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THE BEGINNING

"She'll find, just as her father 'ull find, something she isn't looking for one of these days," said Nurse darkly to a crony.

She spoke in the decided manner of the finished seer, and her friend nodded back at her with affirmatory mysticism. This was not lost on Amaza.

"I was only—looking," she whispered, as the wet leaves and little sticks were savagely shaken from her black frock.

"Well! You'll see something you don't want; that's all. Now you just walk nicely round the Gardens twice with Master Sebastien, and then we'll get along home to tea. For," she spoke to the other nurse, who was staring at Amaza with some new-born pity, "this is what I call a regular raw day, and it goes right through you."

She had said it was a "roar-re" day, with a ripe roll of the word that Amaza, being an epicure in sounds and sights, decidedly liked. She said it to herself, rippling her red tongue in her grave mouth as she and Sebastien went off according to directions.

Her tongue repeatedly and silently said "roar-re," her eyes were fathoming the intricacies of each winter tree high up, and dwelling on the wine-tinted patterns of sodden leaves low down. Sebastien watched her; as grown men watch the desired woman. He thought her the most darling girl in the world, and she considered him the bravest boy. Indeed, he was both handsome and sturdy, and already showing the bright beginnings of a soldier. Amaza felt this so subtly, and responded to a fighter so well (being herself the steady explorer), that she had been shaken right through with joy when he one day appeared in the Gardens wearing a crimson

comforter: knitted by his aunt—an overflow of missionary activities. His aunt was always sending cold clothes to the warm heathen.

Amaza had been quite happy until another boy, who was unhealthy and therefore disagreeable, had blightingly remarked that the comforter swore at her red hair. She was bitterly ashamed of her hair, and neither nursemaids nor playfellows ever allowed her to forget its existence for a single moment. Even the people who loved her, pulled her locks and laughed. Even her father, who should have loved her best, said thoughtfully sometimes, "Little red-head."

Yet that, as Sebastien remarked when she sadly told him, "is better than being a Roundhead."

The fiercest feeling in his heart, next to—no, before—his adoration of Amaza, was a loathing of Oliver Cromwell and all his works.

The December afternoon was dark and murky; yet was enriched with purple shadows, for those with eyes to see; with jewelled gas-lamps, now being lighted; with the crimson-tagged majesty of fast-floating clouds.

The iron railings round the Gardens of Russell Square made a springing zone of mystery; made you feel the delicately guarded and willing captive, since all sorts of things were kept out, and only the finely distilled essences of common sound came in. Amaza's brain was young, yet her spirit was already so far ahead of it that she could feel these things, hardly knowing that she felt. All she knew was a delicious sense of sadness.

Distant traffic came as a song; fascinating, yet faintly terrible: just as the roar of the Zoo tigers and lions at feeding-time stirs in one some startled, savage joy. The souls of dead and gone ancestral huntsmen breathe fire in our pallid bodies at those moments!

Sebastien and Amaza who, although not related by blood, were drawn close by the bond of solitude, had once been taken to the Zoo; when it came to outings, they were always taken together. Amaza, in the wild beast house, had remained quiet, the striped bodies and flaming eyes were too much for her. The biggest and most restless tiger was taking an improper interest in

her hair. Sebastien had talked fast of those early Christians who had been thrown to lions.

These two children walked in the Russell Square Gardens at that time which now seems so very far away; the early eighties of the last century, shall one say? Bloomsbury in those days was a withdrawn and dignified quarter; with quite a Puritan exterior as concerned the squares and superior streets, with a reckless enough heart when you went eastwards towards Gray's Inn and all the stately dingy houses near it.

There were no Tube stations and no motor-cars. There was, in fact, as Amaza said to herself when she was a grown woman and things vastly changed, "no—nothing." There was the clean air of a country market town—by comparison with to-day! There was a certain leisurely pensiveness.

There were no trams in Theobald's Road. The servants always called it Tibbald's Row. Amaza thought of it as Tibbald's, and the place where charwomen came from: the bundle of rags, miscalled a woman, who came on Wednesdays and Saturdays to her father's house and helped to scrub, lived in Emerald Street, off Tibbald's.

Southampton Row had not been altered, but was narrow and winding with, at the west corner of the Holborn end, a dignified household linen shop to which you ascended by shallow, sweetly curved steps.

The big hotel had not been built, to ruin the east side of Russell Square. And on that side, near Bernard Street, was a particularly dignified house, also with shallow, curved steps: it had that in common with the superior linen shop. Sebastien said that once a great man, a very famous man indeed, had lived in this place with the bowed windows and the imposing entrance. Amaza had always meant to ask what his name was and why he was so great; and she always forgot. When she and Sebastien met in later life, other matters proved more absorbing.

In the eighties, gates still shut off the main traffic; so that nothing rattled through the Bloomsbury streets and squares in very early morning, to wake you up as it rumbled through towards Euston.

When Amaza was a very little girl and walked with Sebastien just as it was growing dark on a day near Christmas, there were flat-faced shabby old houses on the spot where the School for Shorthand now stands; houses that were let out floor by floor to interesting and rather impecunious people. Every winter afternoon, almost (when you did not see him, there was a blank to the day), a man on the second floor of one of these houses would start playing the fiddle. You saw him just at that moment when you left the Gardens to go home to tea. Amaza never forgot the feeling of it all; the wet, cold smell, the insidious faintness of the fog, and the way it tried to choke you and put its fingers in your eyes: grey tender veils of rain, the general dimness and lovely melancholy, the blessed red of Sebastien's comforter. The chattering bunches of nurses would collect their charges and take them home from those select Gardens, where, as the children said to each other with solemnity, "no common children ever come." They all had a finished snobbishness imbibed from well-trained, expensive servants.

It was just then that Amaza would see the man with the fiddle; playing in firelight, the blinds right up. He had a shock head of silver hair. She envied him that. His loose big body swayed as he played. Amaza, who saw everything that there was to see and was always looking for those things that were not, had to imagine his face; but she felt sure that it must be very, very beautiful. The sight was so shy and sacred with her that she never mentioned the fiddler even to Sebastien. She could only hope that Sebastien also saw and also was too delicate to say.

On the first floor of the same house there was a new baby. On Wednesday last, which was fine, the nurse had taken it out of doors for the first time and walked with awful importance on the sunny side of the Square. She was a fat and friendly-looking nurse. Amaza had watched the flowing white skirts of the new baby with love and awe—for wasn't it fresh from the angels! She had prayed, until she thought her body would burst, that it might some day be brought into the Gardens.

When she mentioned this to her own nurse (not being able to support suspense any longer and uncertain of the Lord's intentions) she was told that the baby's parents were quite "common people"; they didn't even keep a regular servant and had not a house to themselves. They only had apartments. It is impossible to convey the scorn with which Nurse said this one word "apartments."

There was so much to look at and look for, so much to talk about and speculate on, here in the Gardens of Russell Square that Amaza marvelled at people who could support the fever of a busier quarter. They must have wonderful brains. She said as much to Sebastien, who smiled at her with affectionate loftiness.

For example, she was arguing, when one walked in the Gardens every day from half-past two until four, unless it rained or unless it happened to be Sunday, just think of all the carriages which drove up to and drove away from those wide house doors—double doors, with the absurd habit of the double knocker. It was one of her ambitions, more, it was one of her projects for the future, to some day knock with both hands at the front door of a Russell Square house—a knocker in each hand! For, of course, they were put there for no other reason. As for Sebastien's grand talk about uniformity (a word borrowed from some grown-up; she borrowed words herself), that was ridiculous. Yet she did not tell him this. Already she had learned the wise lesson: that, whereas the woman always knows best, it is politic never to say so. Because women have forgotten this, they have lost their influence and are causing trouble. Amaza was going to be one of those who never forget.

Then think of the people you saw! At windows, over railings, on the pavements, stepping in or out of carriages! Men-servants, appearing intensely bored, looked blankly over the tops of dining-room blinds. They all had faces just like Turvey, who was the butler at home. Evidently some little babies were born marked "Butler."

Maid-servants, decidedly more various and cheerful,

appeared on area steps from time to time. Milkmen went along in gaily clattering carts and wearing lovely white smocks. Sometimes a servant would step out and whistle shrilly for a hansom. When it grew dusk, there were lights in upper windows, and presently pretty ladies would be dressing for dinner and for party-going, behind discreet blinds. Amaza yearned to be grown up and beautiful; although she bitterly knew that she never could be beautiful unless she shaved her head and bought a most life-like black wig.

Then, again, were there not cabs coming up, sometimes—cabs laden with luggage that was covered with the most fascinating labels! Some of those trunks and bags might have come from cannibal islands. How did one know?

Wonderful things happened in streets and houses all the time. More wonderful things had happened in the past, and the most wonderful things would, of course, happen in the future. That will be when I'm grown up, reflected Amaza. She meant that her career should be coloured.

Sebastien, as she talked and as she trotted beside him, kicking up the wet leaves with her toes, remained patronizing and unmoved. He had his own thoughts; moreover, he had the sense of sex reticence, which he never forgot. He was implacably masculine and already disposed to regard woman as the debatable sweetmeat. He was of celibate stuff.

Amaza, bent on stirring him, went on to talk of that empty house on the north side of the Square. It had been empty for as long as they could remember. Perhaps it stood empty even before they were born. Surely no one could remain unmoved at such a thought! The grimness of the Bloomsbury quarter clustered most thickly round that house, and you could not dismiss it with a grin. When, in their walk round the gravel path they came just opposite, Amaza got up as close to the railing as she could, pulling Sebastien with her. They stood still and stared. An old man with a barrow, who was sweeping up leaves, said, "By your leave, missy," and grinned most affectionately. Amaza instantly loved

him. She was wax in the hands of those who were kind, and she always would be.

She clutched at the cold railing. There were the bills in the blank windows, there was the black and white board stuck at the area gate, there—oh, joy!—was the caretaker. You hardly ever saw her. All you knew of her as a general rule was that weak light right down in the kitchen, which started to flicker just as you went home. Amaza's body was actually trembling. Sebastien could feel that.

"I heard Nurse tell the Okeys' nurse," she whispered, "that there was a murder there. It's haunted, of course. You can't get the blood-stains out of the dining-room hearth. And there's the caretaker standing in the dining-room all alone. Unless," she gave a terrified, quite silly laugh and spoke in cold jerks, "the ghost is somewhere at the back. Oh, how can she!"

The caretaker was lean and corded-looking; dressed in black and backed by frightful shadows. Amaza compared her to a spider in a web; one of those country spiders that lurk at the end of tunnels, through which they rush to pounce upon the fly. Fortunately all the flies that passed the windows of the haunted house flew by unscathed. No one went up the steps (which was the tunnel) to ask that terrible old spider-woman with the black cap and yellow face if the house was to be let upon a repairing lease, and whether it was Cubitt built, and could she answer for the drains.

"It isn't haunted," insisted Sebastien. "Come along and don't be such a silly. My aunt says that such reports do houses a great injury, and she wonders that owners do not take an action. She feels everything very deeply. She cannot help being serious. She was talking about it to the Rector when he came to lunch the other day. He only laughed and said that the Duke had too many houses to bother about one. He said that when the lease fell in, they would very likely alter the house a great deal. All the leases will be falling in soon and we shall see great changes. He is a jolly man and awfully good."

"I don't like a jolly duke."

"Amaza dear, I meant our Rector."

"Did you? Well, but even then jolly and bad go together much better than jolly and good," she returned, walking on.

For what was the good of getting your feet wet and your hands stiff with gripping hard at cast iron if Sebastien refused to take a living interest in the haunted house—if he allowed himself to be quite destroyed by the ready-made views of grown-up people!

They went walking sedately round and round. Already, they had been round three times, not counting ghostly stoppings by the way.

Groups of children in the Gardens were thinned, and straggling processions of threes and fours and fives went towards the gates, were seen along the brown and gleaming pavements. It was wearily trying to rain a little! You could feel sure that, as the children went, they were saying to each other, "Our parents pay pounds a year for us to have the entry to the Gardens." They generally said something of that kind; the Mallards in particular. Amaza was tired of it; she had a quite regal contempt for money.

There was still, however, quite a cheerful company to be seen. Through the bare branches of the old trees, through the mist and the smuts and the tame sparrows, you glimpsed at gay frocks and heard shrill cries. All the little girls were in bright winter dress save Amaza, and she was motherless. A curly black cap of Persian lamb sat tightly on her flaming head.

"I suppose," said Sebastien, feeling suddenly sociable, afraid perhaps of Amaza and her goblin-like talk—or perhaps already at that initial stage of being shy with her, and so snipping at his string of joy, lest it should prove a coil, "that we ought to go and talk to somebody. The Mallards are on that seat, and some other kids too."

"It is quite a long seat and lots are on it." She shrunk and looked pained—for did not Sebastien want to get rid of her? She had loved him and she had wearied him—this, then, was to be her fate! To adore, to exhaust, to be left!

His soul had forsaken her. She felt the lonely sensation which already was quite old with her. She woke up in the morning with it sometimes, and tumbled moodily back upon the pillow. It was the sensation that some one whom you trusted had stabbed you and left you.

She looked through the railings at a muffin man with a white apron and a cheerful green baize cover to his nicely poised tray. The bell he rang sounded friendly and permanent. Friendly, too, was the call of that person who came round the Square every afternoon just at dusk (all the nice things came at dusk), crying, "Chickweed and groundsel for the little bird." Probably the people you did not know at all, and never would know; the people you must not know because they lived in apartments or off Tibbald's and were "common"; they were the kindest and the most true.

She listened to the chickweed and groundsel cry. He said "chickweed and groundsel" very solemnly; it was a regular proclamation. And then he said, "for the little bird" in a quick, affectionate patter. It was clear he had a tender and a constant heart.

"Everybody is on that seat," she complained, hanging back, her black legs crooked and foolish. "The Mallards and the Okeys and the kind French governess."

"And the little Jew chap," added Sebastien disdainfully.

"What is a Jew?" asked Amaza.

She knew; yet had already attained to most valuable knowledge: that it would please and mollify Sebastien to be asked questions. If you asked questions enough you would enchain him for ever. He wouldn't have breath enough left to run away.

"Oh, a Jew is somebody who hasn't got farther than the Old Testament. I'll tell you more about them some day. Lots of Jews have left Bloomsbury and gone to live in Maida Vale. My aunt says so."

"Have they?" asked Amaza very thoughtfully.

She had always felt that there must be some beautiful pun or play upon words hidden in those two words Maida Vale. Moreover, it must be a marvellous place; it sounded so. She considered that it must imply that

mysterious hollow over the top of the next hill—the place to which you never come.

She and Sebastien stared through the railings at the mouths of those streets leading out from the Square, into the bigness and the business of the world. Streets leading not only to happy, withdrawn spots such as Maida Vale, but to the British Museum, to the City and to Piccadilly Circus. Round about the region of Piccadilly Circus a mother, when you had one, sometimes shopped. Amaza had more than once been taken in the carriage with her mother to this dazzling land of stones and stuffs. She had found it marvellous and most confusing. Sebastien had never been; not only was he motherless from birth, but his aunt was an austere lady with fixed views on dress. She thought it wicked to look nice; although she really need not have troubled. Her gaunt raiment was sent to Russell Square on approval before she bought it. One of Amaza's infrequent excitements was to watch from her nursery window, round black boxes lettered largely in white on their way to the house of Sebastien's aunt. Errand-boys carried the boxes, and neat young dressmakers tripped before.

"He's gone, and that's good," murmured Sebastien, as the pallid Jew boy was led off. Sebastien was what some might call bigoted: and that is merely a perversion of fervour.

Amaza was trusting that they would all be gone from the long bench before she reached it. She stared at them resentfully; at the girls—who do not matter much to this story; at the boys, who, more or less, would later on impress her turbulent life.

There was but one ray of gladness—since the bench remained stolid; round eyes staring glassily. At least, the Langfield girls were gone.

Yet she would have been better pleased had the bench been crammed tight with children, because then she and Sebastien might have bowed politely and passed on. As it was, they were now ostentatiously crowding together to make room for them to sit down. One boy --it was Humphrey Mallard, who was quite big and going to boarding school after Christmas—took himself

off altogether. He was to be seen moving moodily among the shadows of the Gardens; quite alone and looking sulky. Then he stopped and talked with affability to the affectionate ancient who was sweeping dead leaves into a barrow. Amaza hated Humphrey—since he always tried to snub Sebastien. Yet now she said softly to herself, "I'm sorry for the poor beast." She divined just how he felt; awkward and angry and out of place among the crowd of small children and giggling nursemaids: he, who was big and felt himself even more than a man.

"I'm so glad they've gone," she said, dismissing hulking, unhappy Humphrey and reverting to the Langfields.

You could never rely upon Amaza in conversation, any more than you could rely upon the flitting birds upon the boughs.

"Glad who's gone?" asked Sebastien, staring.

He had kind brown eyes, and when he looked puzzled you loved him best.

"The Langfield girls, of course."

"We are all glad," said Wally Mallard briskly from the seat. "They were quite common, and I believe they were poor. They lived in Woburn Place, and there are boarding houses there."

"You can't catch boarding houses," said his elder sister grimly—she had just recovered from the mumps and was hardly out of quarantine.

"You shut up, Cordy. They were common. Father said so. They have gone to stay with their grandmother in Cheshire while their mother is travelling."

"My father"—Amaza sat down—"is junior partner in Mummery's bank."

She had said this many times, and she spoke with immense dignity, saying the word junior with particular emphasis.

She was not quite sure what it meant. "He is travelling on most particular business. He is coming home soon. I shall be glad," she added.

The Mallards' French governess, who always gave Amaza a sad, most friendly smile—as two passing close

in a strange land—now smiled more sweetly than ever: her mouth seemed to coo. At the very bottom of Amaza's queer heart there stirred, for the first time and through the sweetness of the mademoiselle's mouth, a sense of something most disturbing. At the same moment, Cordelia Mallard, her eyes looking eager and spiteful and shocked, tried to say something, and the governess stopped her by frowning horribly and muttering rapidly in French. Amaza, listening, wished with all her heart that she was farther on with her French. Then she would have understood.

"My aunt," said Sebastien loftily, and speaking with hardly less of a manner than Amaza, "was county before she married."

At this, they started a symposium of parents and guardians.

"Ours," said Wally Mallard, who was clammy-looking and wore big spectacles, "is a Fruit House."

He spoke in that way when all the letters are capital.

"Humphrey," he continued, "when he grows up, is going into the House. If I live, I shall go abroad to manage our Branch House, where the climate is warm and where you live an out-door life."

He spoke quite calmly and coughed. He was a poor specimen of a little boy, save for his unquenchable pride in the House. It was he who had pointed out to Amaza the divergence between her hair and Sebastien's comforter.

"Humphrey," he flowed on (although his elder sister impatiently muttered "Shut up!") "wants to go to the Branch House. He likes shooting and camping out and that sort of thing. But he's got to stay in London. My father says so. Ours is the most important Fruit House in the City, and the elder son must manage it."

"There is something about a Fruit House in a book of my father's." Amaza spoke eagerly and stared at Wally's weak, spectacled eyes. "It was my grandfather's book once, of course. All our furniture and everything belonged to my grandfather, and Turvey was with him as butler for many years. We have lots of books; poetry and every sort. They are soft when you touch them and

they smell nice. In some, the words are spelt different and look strange. The one I mean has big fat letters and some of them are coloured."

She spoke with sudden fire, taken with her subject, and mentally sweeping away the Mallards, the Okeys and other stupid creatures on the seat. She talked to the whole world. Laughing, a delicious queer laugh that made the other children jump and stare, she sprang up on the seat and flung her small body into an attitude of oratory. With the arrogant push of a thin hand she dislodged Sebastien who sat next: that made more room for the waving of arms. He stood at her side; submissive, thoughtful and very interested. When he grew up, he would preach; yet he wondered if he would do it then as well as Amaza proposed to do it now.

"I want you to understand," she said, speaking distinctly, looking deliberately from one face to the other and pushing back the bright red hair from her eyes and chin, "that the book is wonderful. It was written by some monk, I think, and it ought to have been burned at the stake when he was; but it got mixed."

Her face was rapt. Sebastien, also rapt, was watching —and he seemed to take notes. Wally blinked behind his careful goggles. Even Humphrey forbore from the kicking of leaves and drew near. He stood there grinning, the very picture of a thick and hulking boy. He was amused: for they all knew that Amaza Meeks was cracked.

"The book says," she quoted carefully, "'*Life is the House and Man the Fruit of His own Choosing.*' Isn't that gorgeous, isn't it mystery?"

She said the long words carefully. She stared from face to face. Cordelia and the other girls were plainly sneering—in the feminine way; at feminine distinction. Humphrey looked the lout he was and Wally the finished materialist. Only Sebastien showed a spark of feeling; brightly burning.

Amaza got down from her perch. Her own face died —to misery and blankness. They none of them understood. Humphrey was laughing, and how she hated him. He caught her eye and made, as she put it, "a

face" at her. She had been regarding him intently: with pride and a strange manner of pleading.

"It's rot," said Wally Mallard.

He was the first to speak. His dim eyes bulged. Humphrey had slouched off again.

Wally continued, talking to the Okey boy with marked patronage, "Your governor is with Woodnutt, isn't he, Reggie?"

There was only one Okey boy, and he blinked at this. There were also the Okey girls, who were twins. They blinked too. They also blushed; they were older than their brother, and they knew more. It was common knowledge in the Gardens that the social position of the Okeys was undefined. Therefore, they blinked.

"My daddy *is* Woodnutt," the Okey boy said, with lovely simplicity and perfect trust. "He told me so himself. I asked him. I said you'd jawed me about it. But he only laughed. He explained that he could not put his own name up in place of Woodnutt's. It ought to be Okey over all our shops, but Woodnutt is painted on with some stuff that won't come off. It's like blood."

Amaza's flesh crept; she was remembering the dining-room hearthstone in the haunted house. She listened to the Okey boy with respect and pity. Woodnutt's was one of the biggest shops in London, you could buy everything there. On most mornings she, from her nursery window, saw Woodnutt's van stop at some one's door. It was certainly hard on Reggie's father that his name was not over the shops and on the vans. Amaza hated Woodnutt and would have laid down her life for Okey.

While she was in this overwrought mood of large compassion the bench became empty. The French governess went off with the Mallards, the Okeys sought out their nurse. To their own relief, and also to the relief of those who had left them, Amaza and Sebastien were again alone. They were in some strange way aloof from the other children, and Sebastien never really cared to be with any one but Amaza. He merely had that nature which finds an abstract joy in thwarting itself.

The groups in the Gardens were thinning, although it was nothing like full tea-time. Yet the day was dark.

"The egregious thing about me is," said Amaza, watching another little girl trundle a hoop, "that when I try to turn a hoop it goes round in a ring and comes back to me."

She made a sad muddle of the "g's" in egregious. Now and then she picked up a long word, from some book or some elder, and, thinking it nice, used it where she could and when she remembered it.

"It is a pity to be peculiar," said Sebastien; who was quite peculiar himself.

Looking through the snuff-coloured mist at Amaza, he wondered how and if she would fit into his future life. His mind was made up on his life, and had been —as he gravely said—for many years. He loved Amaza and she was beautiful. He did, however, being the purest manly product, wish that she did not look quite so singular. You could warm your hands at her hair. It was a flaming glory. It was the sort of thing that people would always stare at.

Without warning, she cuddled up to him close. Not knowing why, she was afraid. The Gardens became strange. This was—as she had allowed to him at other times—"one of my moods." She could neither curb nor control them. The smile of the French governess became verily mixed in with the long yellow visage of the spider-woman caretaker. She shuddered.

"Are you cold, Amaza?"

"Only in my soul—truly. It wants rubbing."

Sebastien had never seen her dark eyes darker, nor her delicate face so pale.

"They've forgotten us," he said forlornly, the wave of her mood reaching him.

Through the silver-brown of the great branches, their nurses were talking energetically on another bench.

"It must be something special," said Sebastien. "Just look at their heads. They have forgotten us."

"They always forget everything, except their meals and their days out," Amaza told him, quite with the vexed air of a housekeeper. "My father remarked on

that just before he went away. I heard him say out loud to Mrs. Maxwell that he was sick of it. And it is just because we haven't any mothers, Sebastien, that they serve us so. Will you tie my shoe?" She swung her foot and betrayed the flying lace. "Loops and bows are very difficult, and Nurse will be cross if she finds it untied."

"Is she always cross?"

He lifted the muddy foot to his knee, and fumbling at the shoe-lace, felt a foreshadowing thrill of the rapture that takes grown men.

"Sometimes." Amaza shrugged imperiously—with the manner of waving aside the moods of these common folk. "She calls me 'a regular limb' then. But when she is happy and—what is the nice word?—oh, amiable, I'm 'her poor motherless lamb.' Why, here they come at last. Good-bye, Sebastien dear. One can't say a word before those creatures. You've tied it beautifully."

They slipped down from the seat and advanced. In a few minutes they would part, until to-morrow at half-past two.

"I told you, Miss Amaza," said her nurse, hurrying up and speaking very angrily, "only to go twice round the Gardens. We've been setting waiting for you for an hour and more. It's quite dark, but"—she laughed, and Sebastien could have struck her—"your hair give a better light than any gas-lamp."

Yet, being a just boy, he asked himself this: was it worse to compare Amaza's hair to a gas-lamp, than to wish to warm one's hands at it? For always, he felt that odd desire to burrow his cold fingers into the light and warmth of Amaza's marvellous hair.

"You get along in front," said both nurses together, and speaking in the voice which gives you a friendly push off.

They went on talking in the absorbed way which had possessed them for the whole of the afternoon. Without doubt, something had happened. Amaza's nurse distinctly said—

"I haven't had the heart to break it to her, poor lamb. She's a clinging little creature, Beatrix, but between

you and me I don't think she's got much of a head-piece."

Sebastien's nurse, Beatrix, answered—

"Well, that don't matter, if you're a lady born and can take things easy."

"I am a lady born," whispered Amaza yearningly to Sebastien. "The Okey twins are not, because their father is trade."

She looked quite tragic, as he was led off from her and as she herself was tugged rather than led towards her father's house.

When they reached it, the double doors were flung widely open.

The hall betrayed the lighted, large air of a reception. Amaza marvelled that there should not be banks of white flowers up the stairs—as on those nights when the Mallards' mother gave a party. The Fruit House was a remarkably prosperous affair, and the Mallards were, so some in the Square considered, rather ostentatious.

Certainly, to Amaza's vision, there was even a crimson carpet on the muddy pavement. She trembled and turned cold.

Just inside the door stood Turvey, the butler, with his expressionless face. He had looked just so on the day when her mother was buried.

That had been her old mother, of course. For, again with the gift of vision (gift which brings such grief and rapture), she knew that the lady her father was handing out of a carriage which drew in at the curbstone was a new mother.

Yet how could that be, since this was merely Mrs. Langfield! And there were the two Langfield girls, returned from their grandmother in Cheshire. One had a blue ribbon in her fair hair, the other had a pink. For the rest, they were insipidly alike. They looked like little sheep upon a painted card.

"It would be terrible," thought Amaza, staring idiotically from the blue ribbon to the pink, "if they turned colour-blind and could not tell themselves apart."

"Well, Amaza!"

Her father, startled at sudden sight, turned and kissed

her. He looked troubled. The pointed face and wild red hair reproached him. He was a big—a tender and a yearning-looking man.

"This," he added in the approved way, saying the thing which they are all supposed to say at such a moment, "is your new mamma."

So the new mamma kissed her, too.

In this fashion Amaza was bundled into that common affair of the stepmother. Yet our own anguish is never common, but is always new and always the happening quite sacred to ourselves. Amaza knew that, never in this world, had there been or would there be a little girl so unhappy. She stared with some helpless frenzy at the brooding bare trees in the Gardens; at the snuff-browns, ambers, and departing greys of the day. Rain came softly down—wrapping her—as tears! She wanted to turn round and run for her life and never see any of them again, no, not even her father. For he had betrayed her. Always, when most desolate, she craved to get right away, into the soothing, vague Nowhere. When we grow up, we learn of Nowhere—that it is mirage. In Fate, there is no such thing as the deserter. Wherever you run, your regiment follows.

The second Mrs. Meeks was one of those women with what is called "a presence." She could invest even a ready-made garment with a certain smartness. That kind of person is the hope and joy of dressmakers: at her feet they lay their votive offerings of the latest Fashion. Mrs. Meeks, whose appearance would now-a-days be voted most outrageous, inspired admiration even in Amaza's nurse, who already hated her. Whatever she wore would always look well.

In addition, she was possessed of those snapping, beady-black eyes that arrest and finally shackle a simple man; especially when he is, as Amaza's father for fifteen months had been, the prey of superior servants.

"These," said the stepmother, pushing forward the colourless Langfields, "are my two little girls. You know them already. Kiss each other, children."

She would not say "your new sisters" until she saw how Amaza turned out. For she might prove a tiresome

child; one of those you send to the boarding schools purposely provided for difficult and delicate children.

What in the world, she thought irritably, was the girl doing with that red hair and those enormous dark eyes? With red hair you naturally expected light eyes and freckles. Now Amaza's face was like a thin book bound in vellum. Mrs. Meeks resented the unusual.

Why had not the nurse, for this occasion, put the child in a coloured frock? You did not wish, on marrying a man, to find the ghost of the woman you supplanted, waiting for you on the very threshold.

She had never met the first Mrs. Meeks, yet had heard of her red hair and most unsuitable complexion. Amaza looked a delicate child.

In the brief passing from the carriage door to the house—a pageant, crossing as it were a crimson carpet—the stepmother glowered at Amaza's black clothes and curly fur cap.

With something that lacked the proper dignity, they all seemed to jostle together on the steps at once; Mr. and Mrs. Meeks, the Langfield girls, Amaza and her nurse—the latter looking, as she put it later, "daggers." Turvey remained beautifully imperturbable; but he would make a piquant narrative at the servants' supper-table that night. He had a gift that way. The kitchen, shaking its sides, admitted that Mr. Turvey was a wag.

They all stood in the warm, wide hall for a second or two—before Nurse disappeared, leaving Amaza without a single friend in the world.

"The children had better go up-stairs," said her father, staring not at her, but at the waxy-faced Langfields with their mild fixed stare and stick-out teeth. What faded little beggars they were! How he hated their constant air of being obliging! Such white amiability enraged you. He despised the late Langfield; their mother said the little girls resembled him.

As the three children went off up-stairs he watched them. Amaza was dragging her hand along the rail, and dragging her legs too. He met her glance and there was a sort of splendid fury in it. Quite unconscious, no doubt, but he winced. The Langfields were going

primly, as, of course, they would, and staring about at the pictures and carpets, confound them. Amaza was the only child in the world with a true right to be upon that stair!

Her father cast a look of positive terror towards the dining-room door. Presently he and his new wife would feed there *en famille* for the first time. He began to writhe in the net of the widow Langfield. She had spread it for him very carefully; with such wile and guile that he had not even felt the mesh about his face and round his feet, until he returned to Russell Square.

The portrait of Amaza's mother, red-haired and sombre-eyed and sort of regally sad, was hanging over the dining-room hearth. She was just behind that panel, his dear one! He stared like a fool at the closed door. Would the sight of them hurt her, as they fed, or was she beautifully — heartlessly — withdrawn beyond all knowledge of such things? He did not know. He asked of God great things and God gave him little.

He had, all the time, a thousand subtle feelings and keen desires not required for a partner in Mummery's bank. And he said to himself now that he had been a fool. The Future wagged her skinny finger at him.

A man could only really marry once—and then the chosen woman. True, your first wife might be prose and your second poetry. He did not think this happened often: yet when it did, it must be best—since you brought each other the ripe fruits of Sorrow and Desire. For him! First, he had married a lyric and now picked out a cookery book. These cursed servants with their wasteful ways had driven him to it. He was a dreamy man, demanding little; yet that little in peace and with a reposeful sense of elegant thrift.

He did not hate, he did not even dislike the second Mrs. Meeks. He was merely bored by her, and already he heartily deplored his exaggerated sense of economy. He was also disgusted by her—since she was here. It would be a pig feeding from a silver trough.

When a man brings home as wife the chosen one, as he had brought that dear dead woman whose mouth would smile at him superbly from above the hearth!

That had been indeed a home-coming—the shy,

triumphant return with Amaza's mother. He recalled . —standing there stupid, staring at the handsome panel of the door. How merry and graceful it had been!

His tender, passion-tinted flower of a wife, why had he forsworn her?

As he pondered, the scream of his second wife's silk skirts stirred him. She brushed wordlessly by and ascended the stair.

"A man can love but once; at sixteen, at sixty or in the years that lie between. I drew my prize early," he reflected; adding wryly to his soul, "and this mood of mine is comic, it is irreverent."

He burst out laughing and looked jovial. His big shoulders shook as he too went up the stairs, following docilely far behind.

* * * * * *

The day Amaza most disliked was Sunday; it was a lifelong hatred. She was austerely reared; the fear of God held constantly before her in its most literal sense. Hell was so real that it seemed you might at any time be sent to it by train—moreover, with a single ticket.

The Devil was also an important personage, much talked about and insisted upon. One had his portrait —in books and on bricks. She had Sunday bricks, and you made a picture of Satan tempting the Lord Jesus in the wilderness on every solitary afternoon in seven. Amaza had made these Bible pictures with bricks so often that she did it mechanically; there was no longer any frightful excitement to picking out the lions for Daniel's den, or to seeing Moses strike water from the stony rock.

"When I am grown up," she decided privately, "I will be very wicked. I will invent sins." After that, she had certainly sold her soul to the devil.

Her father, with his bitter-sweet ardour of mind, so unseemly in a rich banker, tried in bereavement to soothe himself by rigid Sunday observance and by listening to long sermons. Amaza would anxiously watch his bored-to-death face, while Dr. Strip was ranting and roaring in the wonderful pulpit which had been presented to him by admirers and which cost so many hundreds of pounds.

"My father," she said seriously to Sebastien one Monday afternoon when they met in the Gardens, "is filling his belly with husks, like the Bible pigs."

The Meekses had for two generations been prominent Dissenters, and Amaza's grandfather had sat under Dr. Strip before the Conventicle was built, and when the Doctor used to preach in a small chapel in a side-street, somewhere in the sepulchral Sunday stillness of the City.

He was considered a great preacher, and very often the congregation had as much as it could do to keep from laughing: the Conventicle wriggled with suppressed sniggers; it enlarged with the broad grin.

Amaza was afraid to death of him; for he stood to her as Heaven and as Hell and for all the spiritual by-ways there may be before you get to either. Magnetized, she would watch the eloquent workings of his face and the waving of his arms. He wore a black silk preaching-gown, and when he waved he looked exactly like a wicked angel; the facsimile, in short, of Satan in the wilderness.

On the Sunday morning following her stepmother's advent, they all went in the carriage to the Conventicle as usual; yet it wasn't usual at all, nor ever would be again. For whereas in the immediate past there had been only Amaza and her father and—far away in the time that was already growing dim, her real mother too—there was now, and always would be, the sham mother and the Langfields.

Amaza had not yet decided, and had not found heart enough to ask any one old enough to know, whether they remained Langfields or had been translated into Meekses.

When she got home she would ask Turvey, the butler, who was a man and had a measured mind. Nurse could not trust herself to speak upon the topic of the stepmother.

The new Mrs. Meeks was looking aggrieved. She and her children were Church of England; the late Langfield had even gone round with the alms-bag. It was, however, a wife's clear duty to take over her husband's religion, and so long as you led a good life it

could not matter where you had a sitting. Yet, later on, she hoped to persuade Lionel to give up the Conventicle and tell the carriage to put them down at St. Jude's just below. She would then snub Dr. Strip when he ventured to call on them in Russell Square; she would, as it were, fling the alms-bag of the late Langfield in his face. She did not realize that the person was not yet born who could snub Dr. Strip.

Sebastien and his aunt went to St. Jude's, and generally the carriages passed each other upon the way. Amaza, whose eyes, so Nurse said, were "swollen out of her head with crying," was not proposing to look out and nod at Sebastien on this most wretched morning. He should not be assaulted by the sight of a head without eyes. Broken-hearted, she watched him and his aunt roll by. In the night she had decided never to smile again. She would follow the example of that Henry the Something who lost his son. One got dreadfully mixed up as a rule between the Henry who never smiled again and the other Henry who killed himself by the extra eating of lampreys.

To be, later on, the Lady of the Non-Smiling Countenance exactly met her views. For she actually wallowed in her nurse's cast-off love-stories, and it had long been a problem as to whether, when grown up, she would be the frozen sort of unplumbed depths, or the vivacious one of wicked wiles and mysterious charm. There were only two kinds of heroines in the stories she had read.

Sebastien, rolling by in his accustomed mood of severest orthodoxy, regarded the Conventicle as an onslaught upon St. Jude's. The building, large and of gingerbread architecture, was already tarnished without and gas-smoked within. He resented it as a setting for Amaza. Sebastien took his tone from his aunt, and she was a stiff Evangelical who had once been heard to remark that Dissenters ought still to have their noses or ears slit. Recording this to Amaza, he could not quite remember—which or both! Yet he was convinced that the slitting, either way, would be most salutary.

Amaza, on the contrary, was imbued with the secret

belief that St. Jude's was nothing but an extremely shabby relation of the Conventicle. It was smaller and you went down steps to it. She would have cut her tongue out before mentioning the matter to Sebastien. She tried hard not to think about it, even; in case he should divine and be hurt.

It was destined that this particular Sunday should be extra-dramatic in every way; although, indeed, to Amaza's fiery spirit, a thousand exciting things were always happening all the time. Your heart could not keep composed for an hour together. She did not know what she would possibly do when she was grown up and courtiers came. Even driving to the Conventicle to-day, she had seen a row of plane-trees, with mellow, citron-tinted leaves sitting yet upon the branches and suggesting birds. They had lighted the Sunday gloom of the deserted streets, they had cheered her swollen face. She had nearly smiled. Now that would have been silly—since she had decided not to smile!

To begin with, directly they had got into the Conventicle and been shown to their sittings with pomp (for Mr. Meeks was a most generous donor) a stranger came into the pew just in front. Amaza knew him for a stranger, and her heart, as she said to Sebastien later on, at once began to bleed for him. For he was in the Griffins' sitting, and she knew just what would happen. It had happened once before. She now waited wickedly for the advent of the Griffin family; the Papa who had a most beautiful crease down the front of his pale trousers, the Mamma who was stylishly dressed and seemed assertive, the two timid little Griffin girls, with long dark pigtails and a curiously sad expression. The elder one in particular looked sad. "She is evidently born to suffering," Amaza had said to herself many times.

She felt that there ought to be a bond between her and the elder Griffin girl—yet a great gulf divided them. For Mr. Griffin, although rich, was in trade, just as Mr. Okey was; you could not ford across the stream to Trade! The Griffins, moreover, lived in Gower Street, which had no Gardens. Amaza did not wonder that Alice Griffin and her sister seemed so pensive. With a

father in trade and with such a name, how could one look otherwise! At the earliest opportunity they will, of course, marry; they dare not stop to be particular, reflected Amaza, who considered that Meeks was a noble name. When she married, her husband would quarter it on to his own with a hyphen. This should be conditional. Otherwise, she would lose herself.

The stranger in the Griffin pew squatted comfortably at his prologue of devotion. Then, just as Amaza guessed it would happen, the Griffins arrived in the middle. There was a smell of scent, a shuffle of silk, a sense of enraged fluster—for Mrs. Griffin was the sort of woman who always suspected a snub. There was the prompt arrival of a deacon—in his impersonation of a policeman! The poor stranger was houked out and given a place at the back. May as well label him "Goat" at once and be done with it, thought Amaza. She considered herself very bright and extra sinful for putting it that way.

Yet you could not blame the deacon, nor blame Mr. and Mrs. Griffin. The same thing happened in the Bible itself when you took a front place that was not meant for you. One could not blame the deacon, nor blame Mr. and Mrs. Griffin; for they were simply living up to Scripture precedent. Evidently the stranger was not found worthy.

Nevertheless, Amaza blazed with indignation and pity. She impulsively wriggled along the cushioned pew, and her eyes filled with those tears that were always ready. The stranger must be feeling so humiliated and miserable; he would never really lift up his head again. Very likely he would go in disgust to St. Jude's where, as Dr. Strip contemptuously said, they were in the trammels of the State.

The Langfield girls were watching her emotion in a well-bred, china-doll way. Her stepmother stooped down and whispered with vexation, "Are you indisposed, Amaza? Sit still, my dear."

She would remember that elegant word "indisposed" and impress Sebastien with it. He wanted keeping in his place.

Her father had been lost to the dramatic entry and exit of the stranger. He remained bent double, his hands over his face. It was an uncomfortable attitude; yet all true believers at the Conventicle had a vague idea that to kneel was Popish—and if not Popish, Ritualistic, which was worse. Amaza in her youth heard a great deal about those mysterious rebels called Ritualists; for in Dr. Strip's fold people impertinently asked each other why the Ritualists didn't go to Rome and be done with it? This sounded simple: the Conventicle quite considered that it was paying to keep up the Church.

The Nonconformist Conscience is deliciously inconsequent and chronically confused. It is one of the most refreshing and topsy-turvy things left us in a seriously logical age.

Amaza knew nothing of all this; yet she did wonder, and had asked Sebastien to explain, just what a Ritualist really was. He returned succinctly that they were jolly good fellows, and that her old humbug of a Strip was not fit to tie up their shoes. He learnedly quoted the titles of several books upon Church history which it would do Strip good to read.

"Although all schismatics look at religion through blinkers," he concluded grandiloquently—and quoting the Rector of St. Jude's.

Her father now remained painfully at prayer. Once he wagged his head; for he was soul hungry, and he expressed his feelings in the queer way he had been taught. He hunched his shoulders and shook his large shock head. Amaza adored his head; she worshipped the very back of it. He was already faintly grey, although not forty. He wore his hair a little long, and the ends were curly. She had once seen a brood of ducklings whose tails curled just so.

He gave a groan which he turned deftly into a clearing of the throat. He suffered with his throat.

His father had groaned quite a lot when religiously moved—but groanings were gone out!

The new Mrs. Meeks, meanwhile, was feeling irascibly that this service threatened to be weird. She was also conscious of being stared at; yet that one was accustomed to.

Amaza wanted to touch her father, stroke his knee, kick at his leg with her sympathetic foot—anything! Her stepmother sat between. She always would be. Betweens were not nice.

"He ought to have a real religion," she thought desperately. "There must be one somewhere." She would have sold her soul to get him one: just as once she had surreptitiously spent her last penny on a quack cough-mixture because he had confessed to a tickling in the throat.

It really was an overloaded morning, from the artistic point of view. Drama lay heaped upon drama; even Dr. Strip's similes were more mingled than usual.

When the service was over and they all streamed out into the still, grey Sunday street, there was a real infidel standing outside the Conventicle. Amaza wondered, for one joyful instant of wild imagination, if he were the banished stranger diabolically transformed. Satan was quite equal to that; it would be mere impplay.

She had never seen a live one before; she had heard of dead ones who repented on their beds at the last, uttering frightful cries. She would not have suspected this one had not her father hissed into the stepmother's ear, "Atheist." Now atheist and infidel held the same hellish meaning: and she loved to think her father hissed—which he did not!

He was giving away leaflets which insisted that there was no God. Amaza would have called them tracts; only tracts were good and these were bad. They had, however, the same milk-white, innocent manner to them. Satan again! How clever he was, remembering everything. She hated tracts and the unearthly pious children who dwelt (and died) therein.

He was trying hard to give away leaflets, but every hand was suddenly stiff, and righteous shudders fluttered down the street.

Every hand was stiff—until Amaza's father relaxed his. *He took one.* It seemed as if the foundations of the round world were giving beneath her.

The sight of the infidel certainly held and allured one.

He exercised a most terrible fascination; they always did. Evidently, she thought, he desires to sift us as wheat. She had a good memory and was imbued with Bible-reading. The sinister thing was that he looked so harmless; he did not resemble Satan as Dr. Strip resembled. He appeared pallidly in earnest, as if he really thought he was doing his duty. He was mild and benevolent; his gold glasses were highly respectable. He looked as if he were going home, a little way out, to an early hot dinner. All this was his cunning. He had neither horns nor hoofs. Amaza's eyes, swift and very bright, travelled from his boots to his bowler hat and back again.

She got into the carriage in a dream, her stepmother giving her a slightly feverish push. Sebastien with his aunt, both of them bearing large Prayer-books bound in crimson and expensively tooled, were coming up the steps from St. Jude's. It was only a stone's throw from the Conventicle, yet Amaza did not even see them. All she did see was that her father packed the infidel's devilish leaflet carefully into some inner pocket. There was a chuckling look of triumph upon his face. She trembled for his soul. He had put down his money for a real religion—and picked up the wrong ticket.

She and the Langfields had the usual nursery dinner of roast meat, with plenty of vegetables and gravy. They were told to eat slowly and not forget their bread. It would have been delightful to have the Langfields—had they only come to dinner and been "company." For Amaza was a lonely child, and her nurse was a person of moods. But when one knew that the Langfields (or the new Meekses; which were they?) had come for ever and for ever! That was altogether different; that was, as Turvey had said to Mrs. Maxwell the day before yesterday, "another pair of shoes." Sebastien had explained what this cryptic reference to shoes meant. He knew a great deal and guessed at more.

Amaza gulped down salt tears with her nice brown gravy. Nurse, at the top of the table, spoke never one word throughout the meal, once she had started them off. Her eyes said at every mouthful the amiable Lang-

fields swallowed, "I wish to gracious it would choke you!" Amaza tried to catch her glance in a doleful, friendly way; for they were both (again she was thinking in the picturesque terms of Turvey) "in the same boat." Nurse, however, was in that stony mood of sulks when the eyes look at nothing in particular. That is when her soul has its day out, Amaza had remarked to Sebastien once.

Altogether, it was a doleful day; extremely dark, the Square quite empty and the rain streaming. Sundays were always bad, and this one worst.

The children went down-stairs to dessert later on. Mr. and Mrs. Meeks were sitting silently at the highly polished table, dishes of good things spread out between them, and Amaza's real mother smiling quite affably. Yet you could not quite say just what she was feeling. Amaza's father shot supplicating glances at the subtle face whenever he dared. He had not realized, until he returned to Russell Square, that the thing he had wanted was not a new wife, but that more rare possession a cook-housekeeper with a conscience. His honeymoon had been a dream, his wedding-day the sleeping dose. Now he was awake and feeling sick; as you do after a sleeping dose.

The children sat down when and where bid. They munched nuts.

"Queer little monkeys," shouted Amaza's father, and laughed raspingly as he looked fleetly at the three. He had that way. He was noisy and sudden. The discreet Langfields cast watery glances of affection at their own mother. Amaza, her big eyes bolting, stared at hers.

"I think," said her father, stirring from a silent mood —he was all moods; he was rain and wind and shine— "that Turvey shall go down to the Conventicle with a note to Dr. Strip. I shall enclose that atheistic pamphlet. It is right that Strip should know. Just ring the bell; you are nearest. I'll go and write the note. Tell them to send Turvey to the study when he is ready to start."

He spoke to his living wife and stared at his dead one. He blundered up and went out of the room, shutting the door more noisily than he need have done. The very best people wreak their overwrought feelings

upon the helpless door sometimes, although it is a remarkably ill-bred thing to do.

"I should have been sent to bed for a bang like that," reflected Amaza.

Yet she forgave him—and that instantly. To her he was, at this tense time, the most precious and the wickedest man upon earth.

"It were better for him if a mill-stone were hung round his neck," she was quoting silently: since she believed herself to be one of those very little ones of whom the Lord had spoken.

Suddenly, her endurance broke, just as her father's had broken. The second Mrs. Meeks cast a stolid atmosphere about her which sent sensitive people raving mad. She was, in brief, a worthy woman—all morals and no devotion.

Amaza slipped down from her chair and stumbled out of the room. She could not see where she was going. She bumped and barked herself against the legs of the handsome, out-of-date furniture. It was solid and grim. When your eyes were full of tears the world became a fascinating and most fairy blur; yet you hurt yourself. Evidently you always hurt yourself horribly with the nicest things. One must choose between being dull and comfortable or being bruised by rapture.

She shut the door behind her very quietly—since children must behave. The tears, without warning, broke down her face like a waterspout.

Nobody followed her, nobody hurled a parting inquiry. She wasn't even scolded. Mrs. Meeks was glad to see the black frock and ghost-white pinafore disappear. She wanted her own little girls to herself. She was one of those thick women whose maternal instincts take the form of resenting other people's children. Yet she quite meant to be nice to Amaza, once things had settled down. Already she disliked the child, yet she would do her duty.

The nursery was empty. Amaza, shutting a second door, and shutting it softly, flung herself face forward upon the spotted skin rug. There was always a sense of the wild and sinister to that rug. Once it had roamed

the forest, seeking its prey from God. She spread her arms out—as the bars of a cross. She spread her legs—as the blades of a pair of scissors. When you grow up and are in grief you cannot take these soothing attitudes. In company, convention restrains you; in solitude, your sense of the grotesque.

A horrible dread had overtaken her; it was the top stone upon her high misery, and she toppled. She dreaded lest Dr. Strip should snub her father and hurt his feelings. That those she loved must not be hurt: this was already the key of her life.

She lay spread out upon the rug, taking the form of the animal she lay on. She was consumed by Terror, burned away by Imagination.

All kinds of awful things might—and certainly would—happen. Dr. Strip would deride the whole affair, he would resent her father's interference, he would hold him up to contumely. He would preach upon the matter and say what meddlesome fools some men were; for he never minded what he said in the pulpit, so long as he provoked a snigger. He might even mention names, and then her father would have to slink out of the Conventicle, just as the stranger had slunk from the Griffins' sitting. "Yet I," she sobbed, "will go with him into the wilderness."

And the wilderness sounded nice.

It would all happen to-night, for a certainty. She had heard her father say to her stepmother as they rode home from chapel that morning, "I shall go to the evening service and see if Dr. Strip refers to it."

"I shall be so worried about him. I shan't get a wink of sleep," moaned Amaza.

She wove the daintiest robe of sympathy for those she adored, and kept the generous corners that were over for herself.

It would be terrible. She sobbed and sobbed, listening critically to the snuffling, sad sounds. She had got beyond control.

"I will make myself dangerously ill," she said hopefully—and thought of her beautiful death-bed.

She was dragged from it by the sleek shutting of the

street door. That was Turvey. Everything he did was smooth and cat-like. Amaza rushed to the window and looked far down, through bars. She saw him cross the Square. He held his umbrella up and picked his way between the puddles. He appeared gingerly, dignified and sullen; there was an air of genteel protest all over him. He objected, as it were, to be torn untimely from the culinary bosom of Mrs. Maxwell. The housekeeper's room, always a place of feasting, burst its bounds on Sundays and fed far into the afternoon.

The deed was done.

Amaza could not return, face down, arms and legs luxuriously spread, to the leopard-skin and cry. Such moods and attitudes were instinctive; by repetition you destroyed them. She was already a great artist in moods.

The spell of ardent weeping was broken, and she merely regretted that her nose was so red.

What could one do! She shrugged and spread her hands; staring at the paper-flowered wall, appealing to an imaginary audience. She would love to sway the world with her quick posturing. Even to be a mountebank would be better than being obscure. She simply could not get out the bricks and put Satan, laborious piece by piece, into the wilderness. He was far too like Dr. Strip. She could not make any of the Bible pictures. They made her feel sick. She had done it so often. It seemed, to-day—rain streaming, those beastly Langfields down-stairs and Turvey going round the corner with that fatal note in his pocket—as if for hundreds of years she had played with sacred bricks: and there would be hundreds of years more!

"I will go," she said, suddenly inspired, "and see Sebastien. He will understand."

With that delicious air of intrigue common to the best women she got into her black coat and jammed on her curly, furry cap. Never in her life had she been out of doors alone; the quack cough mixture for her father had been obtained through the medium of the agreeable charwoman who lived off Tibbald's. She was so uplifted now, so charmingly excited that she quite felt as if she never meant to return to this warm, big, dreary house.

Long imprisonment, starvation of the spirit—they were over! She and Sebastien would embark upon some fairy-free ship for fairy shores. Her every hope hung now upon Sebastien, and in the fleet—yet never fickle—way she had, she magically transferred every tender feeling she had ever known to swell his account at Love's bank.

Escape was easy. Nurse was far below in the kitchens. Sounds of Sunday revelry came indecorously up the stairs and rippled over the sedate house. The servants were making more noise than usual that Sunday, doubtless in defiance of the new Mrs. Meeks. They had decided to stand no nonsense, but to give warning in a solid phalanx at once if she put on any airs. Even Turvey declared he would go; feeling perfectly sure as he spoke that Amaza's father would either insist on his staying at a higher wage or would beautifully pension him off. Or he might even marry Mrs. Maxwell, the housekeeper (since they both had savings), and start a neat public-house in the neighbourhood of West End clubs.

Mrs. Meeks, listening angrily to the brutish guffaws that reached her, was also formulating plans. Dining-room and kitchen bristled for Monday morning, when the weary old battle would begin.

She was reading aloud to her own little girls from a calm good book. Amaza put her ear to the keyhole and listened, on her way out to the street door. Why not? It was her father's keyhole. She went on to the study door and listened again. Her father, who wrote with a quill pen, was scratching away. He made a noise like the creak of an omnibus. She knew the creaking of omnibuses well. She went in them sometimes with her nurse, on illicit outings to a married cousin who lived Hackney way. Amaza, who considered herself the soul of honour, never told even Sebastien of these outings to Nurse's relations—to say nothing of the fact that she loved the stolen ride in the yellow omnibus which started from the Royal Exchange. In those days there were plenty of gaily-painted, rockety old omnibuses about. The drivers and conductors were wits of the first water,

who constantly sharpened their tongues upon the rakish coachmen of hansom cabs.

Amaza listened to the scratching. It reminded her of damp straw at the bottom of the omnibus; of the sleepy ride at dusk through Shoreditch back to Bloomsbury. She kissed the panel of the study door. It hurt her to leave her father and for ever. Yet it was his own fault, for had he not already gone away from her? Evidently people had that trick of running off. Your own people —not the nice common people: those who swept up leaves in the Gardens and spoke politely; who provided chickweed and groundsel for "the little bird," who came to scrub, who lived off Tibbald's; who were sometimes drunk and always in debt. They were simple and faithful, she felt sure. Their very sins were transparent. They handed the policeman on the beat a list of them.

She slipped out of the front door and hurried along her own side of the Square, keeping close to the railings, looking anxiously down areas and up at dining-rooms. Sebastien's house was on another side, just as you turned round to Woburn Square where the church was and where, as he had explained a hundred times, a real poetess lived.

The December day was most gaunt and bitter. It was in cruelest contrast to the luxurious house she had left. Everything was turning out exactly as it did in the best love-stories.

There must be great difficulties at first, and eternal bliss to follow after. Sometimes you died before the bliss came. Amaza had decided against that particular ending; for, as Sebastien would have said, it was "rotten."

She went up the steps to Sebastien's house, feeling quite emancipated and important, her heart thumping hard, as it was expected to do. This was an extreme step to take, yet her father had driven her to it. As Turvey said, "the worm will turn."

"I don't feel a bit like a worm; although, of course, one never knows exactly what they do feel," reflected Amaza, flinging up her head and tiptoeing to the two knockers. She was only able to make them sound very

faintly, and they would not keep step; yet one ambition was already realized. She had really begun to live.

The butler person opened the door at once. He resembled Turvey. It was quite uncanny.

"I wish," said Amaza, speaking very distinctly, "to see Mr. Gooch—Mr. Sebastien, you know. Is he disengaged? Tell him it is Miss Meeks come to call, Miss Amaza Meeks."

It was safer to say Miss Amaza Meeks and so identify yourself. For how did she know what the Langfields were?

The butler stared. He put his hand before his mouth. Resplendent menials in the *Punch* pictures did that too. At Amaza's house they took in *Punch*, the *Morning Post*, the *City Press*, the *Graphic* and other papers.

He stared, he stuck his hand before his silly mouth, he actually dared to hesitate. Amaza, with the dignified remark, "I can find my way to his apartment unaided," cut the Gordian knot, slipped past and went with hauteur up the stairs. She would not have felt afraid even of Sebastien's aunt, had they met by the way.

Sebastien was alone at the top of his house, just as she had been alone at the top of hers. His elbows were upon the table and he languidly turned the leaves of a good book. She did not care for Sebastien in his Sunday suit and collar. They could not rise to romance.

"I wouldn't have dared come," she pattered, as she burst in, "if it meant passing the haunted house. I couldn't do that, not even for you."

Sebastien jumped up.

"Golly!" he said—and looked behind her at the door.

"Nurse isn't here; of course she isn't here, stupid!" said Amaza furiously.

She bumped down on a chair by the fire and continued—

"I'm very wretched, Sebastien. You know that."

"Yes, I know," he returned, sounding limp, remaining standing, sticking his hands in his knickerbocker pockets.

For nearly a week these two had withdrawn in the Gardens away from all others and dwelt on the enor-

mities of a stepmother, on the hatefulness of the Langfields.

"If they were boys, they'd be milksops," said Sebastien over and over again; and feeling that he could say nothing worse.

Amaza made it a rule to, as she put it, cut the Langfields dead directly they got into the Gardens. She had to walk across the Square with them daily; a sour little trio, with Nurse grimly going behind. Once through the iron gate of the Gardens, she ignored them. This was an inflexible rule and would be observed for the rest of her life.

"Are they really the Miss Meeks or the Misses Meek?" she asked Sebastien every day. "If they are only Langfields I can bear it."

Sebastien had sorrowfully admitted that he did not know.

He stood now, his hands in his pockets, his face troubled. Amaza hated herself for feeling, as she strongly did, that his face was also timid. She already felt that she had made a mistake in coming. The fairy ship dipped down over her horizon and was no more seen. Early, she was learning the woman's bitter lesson: that man with reluctance takes a large step. She did not yet know—it is late learning—that man's inertia marks woman's salvation, often enough.

"I wish I'd stayed at home," she said, and clenched her hands and cried.

She was consumed by some sudden strange shame.

"Amaza dear—don't. But why did you? You'll get into an awful row. They won't," he spoke solemnly, "let you come into the Gardens to-morrow."

This brought her to her senses. There would then always be tiresome to-morrows, and rows upon rows of days after to-morrow. Sebastien was no knight. This was evident. She had read about chivalry in the nice old books at home.

She looked subdued. You might almost say she looked cowed; yet Amaza, in her most downtrodden moments, never looked just that. And Fate was going to trample on her—hard!

"They'll put you on bread and water, I wouldn't wonder."

"I should like that." Her face lighted. "It would be noble. It would be suffering."

"What do you mean, Amaza? You are so rum."

"I mean that I'd better go back." She stood up looking proud and humble. "It was a mistake, and I'm sorry."

"Oh, don't go now you are here. The mischief's done, don't you see? If you are going to get into a row you'll get into a row, that's all," returned Sebastien easily. He put out his hand for the forbidden fruit in quite the usual way. He dragged a second chair to the fire, pushed her into hers and crossed his legs. They settled down like a couple of accredited cronies. "I'll see you through," he promised.

"No, you won't, you can't; but never mind. There's a hassock under the table; just hook it out and stick it under my feet. Let's be happy while we've got the chance. I believe that's all anybody ever can do."

With complacence she watched Sebastien grovel between the table-legs.

"Things are worse and worse," she declared when they had crouched over the fire again. "By the way, where is your aunt, Sebastien?"

"Out. She reads and expounds the Gospel for the day to five old women in Cosmo Place every Sunday afternoon."

"That's all right. I don't mean about the Gospel. I wouldn't be irreverent for worlds."

Amaza luxuriously spread herself. "I wish you had some chocolates," she said—and then started to tell him every distracting event of the day, winding up with her terror lest her father should have his finer feelings stamped upon by the heedless hoof of Dr. Strip.

"Very often," she concluded dismally, and branching from the material topic into philosophy, "I think I'm going to be quite happy for always. And then it—well, it sort of—doesn't. Do you know, Sebastien? Don't look so thick."

"Not quite," he admitted.

"I feel that it's lying about somewhere; happiness, I mean; the joyful thing. I feel that it is a thing you could pick up and keep to yourself and break off the best bits —bits from the breast—to give the people you love. I believe Alice Griffin feels like that too. She looks it. But I can't exchange ideas because she's baseborn. Her father is a draper. See?"

"No, I don't see," said Sebastien, looking nice and blank.

"You wouldn't. But I do."

"No, you don't—because you haven't found it." He grinned cheerfully, with a sort of "got you there" expression.

"I shall be compelled to call you a perfect idiot in a minute," remarked Amaza, with concentrated annoyance. "You know what I mean—and you just won't know. It does madden me so; it isn't clever of you at all. I'm always looking for it—do be sensible, dear Sebastien. I get into awful rows for tripping myself up. Nurse says I'm short-sighted and will have to wear glasses. I'd die first. Fancy writing sonnets to a pair of spectacles. You couldn't."

"I couldn't, anyhow. Writing sonnets is rather rotten."

"They would be if you——"

"Oh, come, that's cheap, Amaza——"

"So it is," she granted. "What was I saying before? Once I fell half down-stairs. That is a long time ago. Nurse was mad. She shook me nearly to pieces. I told my father about it—not about the shaking; I wouldn't be such a cur—but about the looking for the joyful thing. He said it wasn't so very silly after all, because wise men have felt the same. So there, Sebastien; and you can leave off silly-grinning."

Sebastien no longer grinned. He poked the fire thoughtfully, until the flames danced alike over both faces, making them look old and weird and fine.

"It's religion you mean," he said in a hushed way: religion, as he knew it, already meant a lot to Sebastien.

"How can it be, stupid, when I'm—I'm—what was the word you said the other day?"

She knew; yet it pleased him so when she didn't!

"Unregenerate," he told her carefully.

"That's it." Amaza nodded slothfully. "And what does it mean—just? You told me and I forgot."

"It means"—he was dealing out his own doctrines laconically—"being half a Jew and quite a heathen. Now I am an inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven. You are not even baptized." He spoke with horror. If he had not been so fond of her, he could not have sustained her friendship.

"I'm settled in my views, and quite contented," he continued. "I don't go poking about into puddles with bits of stick as you did only yesterday."

"I thought I'd found it yesterday—the dear joyful thing." Amaza looked entrancing. "But when I fished it out, it was only a red cotton reel."

"And without any cotton on it either. You are a duffer, and a heathen duffer too."

Sebastien spoke with fond regrets and stared at her.

"Well, never mind if I am. The heathen has a free hand, anyhow. When I'm grown up I shall do as I like. I shall have what books call a chequered career. Just see if I don't."

"No, you won't; because directly you can do the thing you like you don't want to do it."

Sebastien had the making of a lovely theological apologist in him.

"It is common to go to chapel," he said after a silence, and speaking in his worst way. "I can't think why your governor sticks to Strip. I read somewhere the other day that before the Reformation—I hate the Reformation—people in church used to spit at the name of Judas. If my aunt knew that, she would spit when she drove past the Conventicle, I feel sure; although spitting is most unladylike."

"Why, it's beastly," Amaza told him candidly; "nobody does it but those who live off Tibbald's—that sort. You don't mind it in them. And I don't care a bit about your aunt."

"Well, she was county once, and she knows. She

says that in London it doesn't matter so much, but in the country no one calls on chapel people."

"I hate your old aunt."

"Shut up. She is my aunt, after all, and my painful duty——"

"Well, there's some one coming up-stairs," groaned Amaza, cocking her ears. "It is not your aunt. I don't believe she would spit, Sebastien, you do her a wrong. It is some inferior person. Can't you hear it breathing through its nose? Inferior persons always do that. Dragons spout fire when they breathe. I hope this isn't one."

"Can't be; dragons are not inferior. Sit tight, Amaza."

Amaza sat very tight; her lips compressed, her chin well up and her red hair streaming loose upon her sharp black shoulders. She was a lean girl.

It was her nurse who came in, and not looking angry, for a wonder: looking plump and pink and pleased; looking, so Amaza considered, as if she felt nice and warm inside.

"Oh, the turn you've give me, Miss Amaza," she said, and laughed. "Mr. Turvey saw you go. He come back to your pa's house to fetch something he'd forgotten, and there was you just slipping round the corner of the Square. Come along home, it's tea-time."

"Are you going to tell my sham mother that I came?" asked Amaza sternly.

"Tell her! Not me!" returned Nurse, with a triumphant chortle: she sounded like a young cock crowing in the moonlight.

"You are a brick," testified Sebastien, with instant relief.

"I've known worse persons," admitted Amaza, standing up promptly. "Good-bye, Sebastien. I'm afraid I've taken up your valuable time."

They shook hands with ceremony. Amaza and her nurse, the latter grinning broadly, started off down-stairs.

"Tread soft, Miss Amaza," she whispered at the first floor. "The old lady's in there."

She was dimpling and smiling in the most unusual way. She looked flushed and comfortable; as with talk and tea-drinking—as with something else! She had not, in fact, come straight from the dank day to the nursery, but had been toasting herself in Sebastien's kitchen. The servants had agreed with many delighted splutters that Sebastien and Amaza were a couple of "rum little cusses." They had added, with much indignation, that the late Mrs. Langfield was a "designing beast."

Sebastien's butler was in the hall ready to open the front door. Amaza was pleased with this attention. She marched on first and, chancing to look back, saw him squeezing her nurse's hand. Their faces, too, were uncomfortably close—and the curious thing was that his was no longer marked just "Butler." He did not resemble Turvey in the least. Evidently this face which men-servants wore was their official mask; it was part of what was called "their personal character." Behind it, they grinned and winked and leered and grew red. Amaza suffered that shock which new-born Knowledge always gives.

When they were out in the Square and Nurse had sworn "upon her sacred honour" not to say one word to a single soul about the escapade, Amaza asked—

"Are you going to marry Sebastien's butler some day?"

"Law, Miss Amaza, how you do talk! I never knew such a forward child. And why should I marry Mr. Huckson, pray?"

Nurse bridled. She flung coquettish glances at everything and every one; unheeding trees, tops of houses, the infrequent passer-by. She need not have troubled. Huckson was not there to see; indeed, he had already retired to the dignity of his own pantry, where he nicely weighed the merits of Amaza's nurse against the merits of Sebastien's parlourmaid.

"I wondered—that's all," said Amaza very gravely. "I haven't any wish to pry."

It was a rule that on Sundays she went down-stairs to tea and stayed with her father until he started off for

the Conventicle. To-day, by secret arrangement with Nurse, she had it alone in the nursery. The Langfields were down-stairs with their own mother, and Nurse had her own affairs to deal with. She brought up a hunk of the richest cake, daringly cut off before it was even deposited in the drawing-room.

"I said you had a bad headache, darling," she announced—being in a most bewildering and soothing mood of articulate affection. "Just have a good tea and enjoy yourself. And here's a nice story book."

She produced a novelette from a pile which she had done with, and with which she meant to light her nursery fires. She withdrew, still smiling. Amaza did enjoy herself very much for a little while. The gods had dealt her the gift of being briefly happy: little flashes of sweetest sunshine through the constant storm! She ate the cake, thrilled with the love affair (although when she grew up, she would manage things far better!). She made believe that the Langfields and their mother, on receipt of a telegram, had to emigrate suddenly. This was so real that she could almost see the boy with the telegram cross the Square.

Then the fire died and the scuttle was empty, and the burden of Life pressed at her hard again. She picked up the last crumbs of cake dolefully with her forefinger, then retreated to the skin rug. She was wretched, yet dry-eyed. That was something to be thankful for. What was the good of crying? It never cured things. She had got as far in the Primer of Misery as that!

The fire was nearly out when the door opened—gently, conspirator-fashion—and her father looked in. She jumped up with joy. She stood still, her face shadowing, when she remembered his new ties. She stood, looking pathetic and limp, looking sweetly sulky, before him.

"What! All alone, Amaza?"

"I'm always alone on Sundays, thank you. It is Nurse's day of rest. She drinks tea down-stairs with Mrs. Maxwell."

"Mrs. Maxwell. Umph!" grunted Amaza's father.

He also looked limp and looked forlorn.

They surveyed each other; with affection, with a certain amount of strangeness and anguished enmity. It was subtly and equally expressed; although one of them was a small child and one a broken-hearted man. She was, as she privately put it, "wounded" with him, and he was exquisitely furious with her for looking so like her dead mother. She was, at this moment, almost more than he could bear. It might have been Lucy herself standing there in the faint, wan firelight; Lucy compressed; fined down into an even rarer edition than she had been.

Walking brusquely, knocking up against things, unable to stand this sight, he fetched the lamp from a side-table, lighted it and set it in the very middle of the room. Now there was a sane steady flame. Now he saw only a small sad child. Now the dead woman scuttled back into the narrow limits of her grave.

"The fire's nearly out," he said, staring around, marking dust and drear cinders; laughing—as he had laughed down-stairs when he called Amaza and the sallow Langfields "monkeys."

"Nurse forgot to send up more coal. Don't be angry with her. I think she's a little—a little—— There is a long word I want——"

"Tipsy, perhaps."

Her father grinned ruefully as he made this suggestion. Why wouldn't these worthless women do the work you paid them to do? Again, the dreary thought twinged him—that his second marriage had been all in vain!

Amaza, her sad smile meeting his, gave a queer cry and flung herself into his arms. There is no word but flung—save bounded: she was just an eager ball! He caught it, and finding a chair, settled her on his knees. Mutely they expressed their ardour and their helplessness. Her head brushed caressingly against him as the head of a fluffy cat.

"That's right, dear, dearest one. And what was the long word you wanted?"

As he asked he held her close.

"'Tipsy' isn't long"—her eyes met his with banter—

"but it will do. My word began with 'E.' You see, Sebastien's butler squeezed her hand to-day. He may have kissed her, too. I didn't turn round soon enough."

"No doubt you turned round very much too soon."

He laughed, but Amaza was suddenly looking frightened to death.

"Oh, now," she said, "I've told you. Good gracious!"

"About your running off to Sebastien's? I know that."

"Did Nurse tell you?"

"She came to me in the study and pitched a lovely yarn," he chuckled.

"But she promised faithfully upon her sacred honour that she wouldn't. I trusted her. What is an oath to them?" asked Amaza tragically, sitting up straight.

"Nothing. Never trust people like that. But remember that she only did her duty in coming to me."

Amaza laughed in his face. Already she was a cynic. He essayed to look sage and parental. He failed most miserably, as he always did. It was delicious.

They laughed together, just as friends and equals laugh. Amaza cuddled back, her head rubbing fondly at his cheek. He was so beautifully big and steady.

"You're like the Psalms," she said, "something about a place to hide me in. What is it?"

"Don't know. You seem fond of Scripture history. I'm glad of that."

"I'm fond of most things when they are nice. Why not? Some of the people in the Bible are not nice, but then they meant well."

Her father laughed again; he roared. There was an ineradicable boyishness about Amaza's father. Perhaps it was a little in eclipse just now. Yet the sun is somewhere, eclipse or no. Amaza, huddled up and quite happy (for as long as it lasted!), was recalling lovely romping times in the not distant past, when he had come up into the nursery and played games with her: not bought games, but impromptu things which you thought of yourself as you went along, and the essence of which was noise. He had looked so comic and big as he

crawled about the floor; his hair rumpled up at once and got rough. He was a lovely figure for playing. He was made for it.

"I shall never trust Nurse again," she said. "She is a traitor; in past times, her head would have been upon Temple Bar."

"Come, come, only if you were a reigning princess."

"The world is full of traitors," said Amaza drowsily. "We won't talk about them any more."

She opened her eyes, then shut them; she blinked. She was intensely joyful.

Her father was considering her. Some day she would grow up and be quite a beautiful woman. She was just that kind of plain child. She had the potential loveliness at which common people jeer. Lucy had been beautiful, in her esoteric way. Her child promised an even more charming mystery.

"And," the bereaved man was thinking, "there will be ever so many beside me and that serious small beggar, Sebastien."

He yearned and prayed for his child; just as he had yearned and prayed for himself when he indiscreetly groaned in the Conventicle, only this very morning. He was a natural devotee; yet had never found the true Way. In his fashion, nŏw, he prayed hard for Amaza: so of course his prayers helped to decide her end.

She would grow up, she would be better than beautiful. It is a world for novelty; with women, as with other things. She would be unlike all the others. She would be a shrine to herself. He watched her eyes when they opened; gloating over the deep fringes that grew up and down. He loved the ruddy richness of her hair.

Her throat seemed too lily-fragile to support it. What a piquant caprice it would prove—this contradiction of red hair and black-lashed eyes! Usually the eyes of red-haired women looked as if you had sprinkled dirty and dull white sugar upon them. Probably in all her life Amaza never had quite such an ardent lover as her father was through this nursery hour.

"The fire's nearly out," he said at last, shaking his shoulders. "Shall I ring for coal?"

"No, no, don't." She was wide awake; the quick apprehension in her lovely eyes cut him deep. "Are you going? Is it time for your Conventicle?"

At once the tears were on her cheeks; for she remembered Dr. Strip and the benevolent-looking infidel.

"Dear, don't tremble like that and look the little lap-dog. I shan't go to-night. Don't feel as if I can sit still and watch Strip pound his purple cushion."

"Are—they—going?" asked Amaza.

She slipped from his legs and tapped the floor significantly with her toe.

He had loved to watch the happy slow swing of her lanky limbs in the black stockings and square-toed shoes with a buttoned strap.

"They have gone to church, all three of them," he returned tersely. "They like it better."

Amaza nodded. She brushed her face with the back of her hand. Her father handed his white handkerchief. She employed it; and neither of them said a word.

"Sebastien is church," she remarked after a bit. "We were talking about it to-day. He thinks it is because I am not baptized that I'm unhappy."

"Are you unhappy?"

"Of course I am; first one thing, then another. I rather like it," she said, with quaint bravery.

"And aren't you baptized? By Jove, no, you're not." He looked at her. "We didn't think it worth while. We were too happy to think hard about anything like that. And, mind, Amaza, forms and ceremonies don't matter a bit. Sebastien is a pocket prig."

Nevertheless, he looked thoughtful. For he gave nobly to Foreign Missions and thought baptism most necessary; yet only for the heathen.

"Sebastien"—Amaza now unwittingly startled him—"says I am a heathen."

"Nonsense! In a Christian country. How could that be? But would you like to be baptized, Amaza?"

He would not have his girl at any disadvantage. Dimly, he began to feel that it might be a social slur; this religious nudity of Amaza's.

"Oh no, thank you," she said quite coolly. "It can't make any difference to my immortal soul."

"Of course not; so long as you are good and do your duty. And what were you crying about just now? Out with it!"

The very question set her weeping again, and her face was fast becoming a little white brook. She told him all her terrors.

"I don't mind for myself," she said grandly (yet she did mind, for, all through, she hated suffering, and, all through, Fate was to feed her with a big spoon!), "but it's in case Dr. Strip should snub you. I couldn't, couldn't bear it."

She was dissolving again—and in salt: she was a funny little Lot's wife.

This sobbing womanliness was sweet. It was strange and new and eloquent. "For even Lucy couldn't yearn over me more," thought the man.

He stroked the fiery red hair; by subtle touches he brought soothing. He assured Amaza that no one—and beyond all Dr. Strip—could ever snub him. He pictured himself, for her complete healing, as a grand creature, standing on a peak far above the valley lands of flouting.

In a very short while they had mended the fire, made a brave blaze and were laughing again. Amaza would always laugh and weep in flashes. They were whispering and chuckling with all sorts of vague nonsense: the silly-sweet joys they had invented and knew.

So that the room was warm and home; nothing less. Infidels did not enter—nor stepmothers! You could forget that any other people even existed.

That is the secret of happiness—when you are just Two.

THE BOOK

CHAPTER I

THE RANDOM MOOD

SEBASTIEN and Amaza met midway in the big drawing-room. They held hands and laughed in that nervous fashion of grown persons who are very much moved. They had not seen each other for years. Amaza had been at boarding school, and later she had travelled. Sebastien had been withdrawn from the guardianship of his aunt and handed over to a distant uncle. He had also been at school, and then to Oxford. Later, he appeared to have disappeared completely from the common view, and now presented himself as a fully-fledged priest in the Church of England. Amaza had heard about Sebastien; from his aunt and from her step-mother; the reports were not encouraging. Yet when you are very fond of a person (and she would always adore her ideal of Sebastien) reports do not matter—for other persons simply hold your friend up by the heels and head downwards: this is always an attitude for contumely.

They held hands and laughed. It was Sebastien, by the way, who blushed—if any! Amaza's dainty face remained the colour of an exquisitely bound vellum book: with this difference, that the book is caressed and enhanced by age, and the face—so far—was not. They withdrew to the window and sat down. A cushioned seat, one of the innovations of the stepmother, ran round it. They stared out at the changed Square, the most conspicuous object of which, seen from the window of Amaza's drawing-room, was the haunted house. Ghosts had been exorcized. A storey had been added. The windows were changed, the brick face was cleaned up and painted. It was now the most conspicuous house in Russell Square: the most expensively rented and the

highest insult to the past. Everything in the Square was changed, now that Sebastien and Amaza were quite grown up. Bloomsbury had turned a double somersault. He had not seen it for years and he felt quite giddy.

"How afraid we were of that house." He nodded at it. "And how they've ruined it; reminds me of that awful Conventicle. It is red and white. It looks like pastry when the cook has cut her finger."

"You hated the Conventicle." Amaza shuddered, then looked pensive. "We do not go now my father is dead."

"I'm so sorry. I didn't remember, I——"

"Never mind!" There was a lovely serenity about her all the time, and her dark eyes were stupid or sweet —according to her mood or your point of view. "I'm glad he did die. For he was never happy, and if there is any decency about anywhere, he must now be in a place where he is happy."

"Why, of course he is; or" (Sebastien was always downright and dogmatic, and Oxford seemed to have extra-stiffened him) "he's preparing to go to the happy place."

"He's looking for the joyful thing." Amaza nodded reminiscently.

"Exactly. What a darling you were in those days, and I was a horrid prig." (He did not know that he was yet a prig, yet a very nice and good-looking one.) "You were bad for me, Amaza. You sat at my feet. You would always be bad for me."

He looked as if he wanted her to say "yes" to this; as if he would be hurt if she agreed: heart and will were opposed.

"Of course I should. My stepmother says I defile everything I touch."

"Oh, come, that's putting it rather——"

"She always puts it—rather." Amaza laughed placidly in his angry face. "You see, I will give sixpences to beggars, and a shilling if the beggar has a baby. My stepmother and the Langfield girls do not; none of them believe in what they call indiscriminate charity. It bloats bodies and perverts souls."

"It doesn't matter what they believe, really. Morality without the mystery of religion is a horrible thing," declared Sebastien.

He watched Amaza's charming face. Was she really simple to the point of stupidity, or was her cool and perfumed manner the last word in finished satire?

He had never really understood Amaza. That did not matter, since he loved her. As he sat here, on the cushioned seat, his steady pulses played him delicious tricks: it was emotional agility quite wasted, since he did not mean to marry.

"Do you go to St. Jude's?" he asked, smiling; for he remembered St. Jude's and the old Rector. The service, as he now recalled it, affronted his Tractarian sense.

"They do—always; I do—sometimes. I'm a free lance, as you know. I haven't any religion. It is really rather a relief. You can play about."

"I hate to hear you talk like that; but it won't last," Sebastien told her buoyantly: for his Faith was strong and clear, it burned white-hot within him, and his priggishness was merely the thin sticks—brittle, noisy and brief. Amaza was too precious to be damned.

"Anyway," he concluded, "I'm glad you don't go to the Conventicle. The new man is a heretic. Dr. Strip, with all his circus tricks, wasn't that."

"My stepmother admires the new man immensely, although she does not sit under him. He is quite devilishly clever. They say he has bowled over three bishops on theology."

"That," returned Sebastien hotly, "is a lie. I beg your pardon, Amaza."

"Don't. Why should you? And I believe you would have loved to put an adjective before "lie." Why didn't you? But we won't talk religion, I am weary of it. My stepmother and your aunt were always fighting about it, before your aunt left the Square and went into the country—to be county once more. My stepmother is Broad and your aunt is Narrow. They can't possibly row, on equal terms, in the same boat."

"My aunt is going to have a shock, I'm afraid." He

grinned quite in the old way—as if once more he walked round the Gardens of the Square, in a red knitted comforter. "She has presented me with a living, and I shall instantly turn things upside down. I shall teach the people a new religion. They are practically heathens down there. I shall empty my church and then fill it. I shall revive the Catholic Faith. It is not dead in the English communion; it is merely buried alive. And," he added, warming to his topic and enlarging his simile, "it was embalmed before they buried it."

Thoroughly did he look the soldier. To Amaza, his black clothes turned bright red. He had pledged himself for the glorious Battle. His uniform was untarnished and quite new.

His face worked and flushed, his eyes were radiant. It was clear, then: Sebastien had found the joyful thing, and she envied him. For her part, she had as yet found nothing. Yet her soul continued to search, and even her eyes were bent upon the ground often enough—in the old childish way of searching puddles. Her stepmother would say, "You carry yourself extremely badly, Amaza, my dear." When one's stepmother said "my dear" it was worse than a blow. In her admirably moral way the second Mrs. Meeks had always hated Amaza and done her duty towards her with a scouring cloth. Amaza's feelings were scrubbed raw.

"When we went to the Zoo together," she said now, "you looked as you look at this minute. You scowled at the poor lions and tigers; you told me all about the early Christians, that their ancestors chawed up."

There was the faintest colour in her face, and she looked so adorable that he longed to kick over his celibate intention and seize her in his arms and hug her then and there. Instead of which he merely said, boyishly, "Those were jolly times."

"The early Christians', do you mean? You did not think so at the Zoo."

"Don't be a goose, Amaza——"

"They were tigers——"

"You are a silly" (he spoke as a child). "I mean that the old days in the Gardens were jolly: the man who

called groundsel and the chap who played the fiddle and——"

"Did you see him, too?" Amaza looked rapt. "He went away, you know. I wonder where."

"Yes, I saw him. He died of drink, without doubt. I remember Huckson used to say he drank. He was very well known in Southampton Row. He was a familiar figure. Bloomsbury was full of figures then. The motor traffic has driven them away."

"His very house is pulled down," Amaza said sadly; then, lifting, added, "Were they jolly times? I don't know. Nurse was a beast to me. She married Huckson, after all, and they have a lodging-house for bachelor gentlemen in Jermyn Street. She comes to see us sometimes—or, rather, to see me. For she hates my stepmother and the Langfields."

"So did you—in the jolly time."

"So I do now, of course." Her eyes opened very wide. "How could I ever do otherwise? As to jolly times, they are the bits behind or the bits before—and never by any chance the bit you are treading on. You think it was always nice in the Gardens, Sebastien, but it wasn't."

"Wasn't it? Well, what's become of everybody? You've been here. I've been all over the place."

"So have I. For one thing, I was packed off to boarding school as soon as it was decent. Nurse used to say my father couldn't call his soul his own after his second marriage, and it was true. My stepmother wanted a Convent school because it was cheap and she was mad to save every penny. She cuts down everything but the dressmaker's bill. Her religion is Broad; so Convents didn't matter."

"Broad!" Sebastien spluttered. "It only means that nothing matters so long as you get it at a reduction."

"My dear father wouldn't dream of such a thing," Amaza continued very tenderly. "The very thought of Popery was a nightmare."

"Poor Pope! He isn't nearly so harmful or so arrogant as Dr. Strip."

Sebastien reverenced the Holy Father. He deplored

the rapacity of medieval popes—since this quality of theirs had precipitated that crowning Teutonic calamity, the Reformation. For Sebastien gravely spoke of Good Queen Mary and Bloody Bess. This horrified his aunt; she considered it blasphemous.

"When I left school and after my father died, we let this house and travelled. My stepmother is all for economy."

"Then you don't know what became of the Mallards and the Okeys and all of them?"

"Yes, I do. Wally Mallard's dead and Humphrey is in the House. Didn't they brag of the House? The Okeys are going on just the same: nobody knows them. One Okey boy went to Jamaica. Oh, Cordelia Mallard, by the way, is very charitable. She and my step-sisters go to meetings together and make scrubby garments for the smarting poor."

Amaza spoke quietly, almost heavily. Her face was reposeful, was utterly indifferent. She had changed. Sebastien couldn't say just how. He was no psychologist. Yet he did feel in his vague, blunderingly masculine way that her early fires were not put out, but only damped down by the constant stream of water directed at them from the stepmother's hose. Amaza would flare up in a minute and burn all the fiercer for her dousing. She only wanted some kindly draught.

"Alice Griffin," she continued, looking more interested, "has come out wonderfully. She is a violinist; everybody talks about her. We went to Queen's Hall and heard her. It was so sad, Sebastien dear. I wanted to cry. She was so wise and weary in her playing. Do you know, the Langfields and Cordelia thought it very morbid; my stepmother is not sure whether the violin is immoral or not."

"Alice Griffin! She was the gloomy little girl out of Gower Street, who went to the Conventicle, wasn't she? I always wanted to pull that silky black pigtail. The Okeys knew her."

Amaza nodded.

"They would, of course. The Okeys and the Griffins were in trade."

Sebastien laughed.

"How solemnly we used to say that to each other, didn't we? 'Their father is in trade.'"

"Yes, and you always spouted, 'my aunt was county before she married.' I don't just know what happened to Papa and Mamma Griffin. Hilda, the younger girl, married a rich American and has gone away. Turvey is dead. Dear old Turvey! Didn't you see that a new butler opened the door? He hasn't nearly such a nice mask. Turvey's was fire-proof."

A dozen little semi-sparkling things Amaza was saying; yet her manner was that of a serene old maid winding wool. The kind puzzled look was all over Sebastien. He wore the expression that made you love him.

"The most awful thing that happened," she pursued, "was the death of the caretaker at the haunted house over there. They found her lying alone in the basement; she had been dead for days. Black beetles were rustling over her. Ugh! The Duke then decided to renovate the house. There are rich Jews there now. Do you remember our Jew boy, Sebastien?"

"Rather! And didn't I hate him? Wonder where he is!"

"Oh, he's well known, in a way. I see his name in the papers. He's a prominent Zionist, or something of that kind. I think that's about everybody, isn't it? There was the nice French governess and that dear little new baby. I don't know what happened to them. Do you remember the baby, Sebastien? No doubt it is almost grown up now. People of that class do grow up sooner than any one else. Perhaps it goes and learns Shorthand over there"—she jerked her head towards the School—"I hate that place. It is stamping on the man who played the fiddle. If the baby is a girl, then it is wearing cheap necklaces and down overshoes—over at the soles and down at the heels, you know. If it is a boy, it has spots on its face. Most boys have spots at some time or the other. Humphrey Mallard was awful. Were you?"

"I hope not."

"It doesn't matter," smiled Amaza languidly, "I wasn't there to see. For it might have been a shock to me. No one loves you as I do. How could they? I am your oldest friend. As for Humphrey, I never see him. He is a social young man and believes in seeing life. That is the stage that comes after spots."

She was evidently grown into a very stupid girl, a very innocent one or a very artful one! Which? Anyhow, she was a dear girl—and how beautiful! Sebastien flushed and turned the topic; for his mind was made up. He was full of youthful ardour and cocksureness; full of the light that he was going to turn upon his country parish: the Light of the World. And he could only do this as a celibate. Other men might marry—and make of marriage a side issue. He would not.

Already he had dissected himself as one of those in whose temperament the conflict between flesh and spirit is keen, and with a clear dividing line. Beneath Sebastien's young, bombastic airs burned furious fires. He never could have loved Amaza calmly, never could have fitted himself into the warm confines of the married trench—as other men: stunned Love into a torpid and a snoring sleep: some dyspepsia of soul. Romance, with him, would remain the consuming fire—once he was weak enough to kindle it. He would not be weak.

Then came another thought, more worldly. She wasn't even a Christian and, as yet, she didn't want to be. Fancy Amaza as a Mrs. Vicar, in a lonely parish. She would set his flock, gentle and simple, by the ears. This provoked his sense of fun; which was honest and steady. He grinned.

"Why are you laughing?" asked Amaza.

"I was thinking of Vicars' wives. They are most amusing. Shall I tell you?"

He threw himself into an oratorical attitude. He wanted to talk, and talk extravagantly. It would cool him—eventually consume him—if he talked. Amaza would cease to be the one woman. There would not be any women. There would be female parishioners! He had very often thought of Amaza, and when he did, too deeply, he had flung himself at and into his books.

He composed sermons. Already he had a fervid gift of preaching. And he could always control the complexities of his body by the simplest use of his brain. The hunger of his heart fed the stream of his sermons. He was a celibate, yet not of the anæmic sort. He had strong desires for earthly love and for all that it brings a man. He made of these desires a ladder. There were dangerous moments when the ladder slipped.

"Is it amusing?" She lifted her brows, for he was infusing the foreign element.

The only thing that she had ever met that approximated to a Vicar's wife was Mrs. Strip.

"You wouldn't call Mrs. Strip a Vicar's wife, would you?" she asked Sebastien.

He answered—

"Good gracious, Amaza dear—no."

"When you say 'no' like that, you might be throwing a football at me; it thuds so. I thought you wouldn't approve of Mrs. Strip. She's dead, poor thing. She used to come down to breakfast in a diamond necklace. She had golden hair, which is always a detriment, unless you dress in—what is the stuff they talk about in old-fashioned books?—oh, duffle. Yes—duffle. It sounds dowdy, doesn't it? She wore shiny silks and sham furs. My stepmother counted the tails on her ermine muff once. There were twenty-nine. The ermine is not a very prolific animal, and it is difficult to trap. My dear father, who was stern in his views and free with his tongue, always said that Mrs. Strip had the body of an improper woman and the mind of a Bible-reader. He said shocking things and did noble deeds. I hope Vicars' wives are not improper women, Sebastien."

He had been listening attentively, and now he stared. He liked to hear Amaza talk; partly because he loved her, partly as a steel for his own tongue. He wished that they should sharpen their wits upon each other—so long as she did not speak out of her turn. In this way they would avoid the danger of Love. They would, in brief, be beavers; each in turn taking a gnaw at the tree. And the tree should be the Vicaress tree.

"Not improper," he granted—being always just.

"It wouldn't matter if they were," returned Amaza limply. "I'm not interested in them, for one thing, and I've never been quite sure what an improper woman is, for another."

"Well, the better the Vicar's wife is, the worse," admitted Sebastien, and talking fast and moving on the cushioned seat in some embarrassment. The sooner he and this remarkably unsophisticated Amaza started gnawing the tree the better. Let the woman be lost in the beaver, for goodness' sake.

"Yes, the better the worse," he repeated, and started on his random mood. "In that way she resembles Mrs. Strip's sham ermine muff. It is when she thinks she has a mission, a definite duty in life that she becomes so unbearable. I've been a curate to a married priest and I know the genus inside and out. I've been treated half as a good-natured and rather lubberly school-boy, and half as an upper servant. I've been sent off to buy teething powders for the baby. Vicars' wives always believe that there are three orders in the Church: Bishops, Priests and Curates. Very often they themselves put on the airs of a Minor Canon."

"I suppose you can't have Major Canons? Alice Griffin would know."

"Hang it all, dear Amaza. Apostolic succession isn't a musical scale."

"Isn't it? How should I know? Go on."

"Shall I? Let me make you interested. She bullies people for not going to church on red-letter days, and considers them to be in a bad spiritual way if they've been heard to speak flippantly of St. Paul. In short, she takes the parson's duty out of his mouth and turns it into a more sour comestible. It isn't a nice analogy, yet the first I could think of. Forgive it."

"Why should I mind? I'd like to meet a Vicar's wife. I'd like to be one—and show them how to be. I wouldn't take a single morsel out of your mouth, Sebastien."

He had summed up the Vicar's wife by those words "in short"—which usually mean that the speaker designs to be long. He proceeded—

"It is so difficult for Englishwomen to be good without becoming oppressive. When they put on Religion they put off Charm. I don't see why they can't wear both, as I do a cassock and surplice."

"One is white and one is black. I know that, because you told me once. Which is Charm?"

"Oh, you can't worry an analogy down like that. The Vicar's wife is really good. The only thing is, I've smarted with her."

"So naturally you can be spiteful. It's the plaster you put on the raw places." Amaza nodded and continued to look calm; dull almost.

Were they not gnawing the tree with a vengeance! Sebastien bared his sharp white teeth again.

"She hectors, bullies and manages everybody. The Vicar can barely get his nose above the level of her exuberant activities. The string of her Dorcas bag strangles him. The organist lives in terror of her, she shortens the life of the parish clerk. The worst ones, perhaps, are those who come of clerical stock and have the English Rectory or the Cathedral Close in their blood. They rather think that Agnosticism means inferior birth."

"How well you are doing it." Amaza listened and watched. "You ought to make a sermon of this, Sebastien."

How clever she was, or how incomparably stupid! Which? He did not know, neither did she, neither did any one else, until the day of her death. Amaza had no logical solution. This is the case with so many people; yet they, as a rule, have misleading by-ways of solving which chess players call "cooks." The key to Amaza was with God. She—far more than Sebastien—was of the stuff that makes mystics.

"You are rotting me. It's hardly fair. I deserve it. But you used to be so kind, Amaza. You wouldn't hurt even a worm. Do you remember in the Gardens once, lifting a worm from the path with a bit of stick and burying him in the earth?"

"Of course. It made me feel so sick. He had livid spots; that kind of worm. There are different ones. He

looked as if he had indigestion. Cordelia Mallard has a complexion of the spotted worm sort. She calls herself a martyr to dyspepsia. All the Mallards eat too well. We went to a simple supper last week, after a Missionary Meeting, and they gave us three different fruit salads. I tasted all. Mrs. Mallard insisted. I wouldn't really be unkind to any one. You know that."

She bent forward, with tenderness and impulse. "Dear Sebastien," she said, with a foolish pat at his hands.

They might have been walking in the Gardens. He felt the warm tickle of his red comforter round his throat again, and it was hard to believe in that flaming twisted coronal of hair upon Amaza's head. It ought to have been in limp thick straggles round her face. He went on bullying Vicars' wives—to ease and steady his heart. He dragged his hands away. He reverted to the topic of the much maligned Vicaress; he gnawed so hard and so consistently that the tree toppled.

Or shall one say that perhaps he was in pain—as a teething baby—and that the Vicaress served as a coral? For, with all his soul, he wanted to ask Amaza to marry him, and with all his strength he was saying inside himself that he would not. Marriage for him would be calamitous. The rapid river of his Love should empty itself into the sea of Religion.

Sounding malicious and shallow—neither of which he was—he ran glibly on—

"When you have taken all the types of parson's wife and shaken them together, you get such an acrid mixture that you wonder how the poor man swallows it. He is forced to the dose. From the time of his ordination he is taught by his mamma, or his other fond female relatives, that it will be good for him to marry. Marriage is a duty, a decency—just as washing his neck was in his nursery days. My aunt, for instance, tells me over and over again that you must have a woman in the parish. When I say yes, but she need not be the parson's wife, why not a body of nuns instead—my aunt shudders. It is no earthly good assuring her that their habit need not be scarlet. Are you getting interested, Amaza?"

He stopped and looked up.

"I am always interested when you talk," she returned sweetly. "Of course I am, Sebastien."

She sat with her head on one side. It was the pretty air of a bird; watchful, gentle. Rare December sun, finding its way into the sedate Square, flung its beams rapturously into her red hair. She sat encircled by a film of her own pure fires.

"Parishes were never worked better than in medieval times," he continued. "There were no clerical wives then. Now-a-days it is considered that the parson, with the doctor, must be married, and so the celibate priest is the mark of every matrimonial arrow that flies. The most foolish virgin will become wise with archery in such a case. Is all this very plausible, very flippant, very—what, Amaza?"

Sebastien was suddenly looking serious and silent and tired.

"It is amusing; go on—if you would like to go on. And it is all so new to me. You see, I really know nothing."

"You don't seem to know much." He surveyed her: he loved her, and he wished that he did not. For the life of him he could not understand her.

"Evidently the Conventicle blew the air of a Convent," he said: and marvelled at himself and congratulated himself, because he was really talking very brightly on most matters to-day. He was talking, you may imagine, with his back set desperately at the wall.

"Very likely; that would be the devil's way," granted Amaza. "The result will be bad. It must be. You wait and see, Sebastien. I shall become a castaway."

From a little girl, she had formed this quaint habit of semi-quoting the Bible. Sebastien remembered.

"Don't," he said gently, "talk like that. And we won't fish in deep waters. I'll just go on whipping the stream."

He spread himself once more into the attitude of oratory. He looked not into Amaza's attentive eyes, but blankly at the wall. That would be better.

"No one denies," he granted, "that the parson's wife

as a rule is extremely active. That is her cunning: the first instinct of every interloper is to look round and find a reason for trespass. The Reformation, you know, just winked at the parson's marrying—nothing more. If she would only be idle, if she would retreat into oblivion and allow the world merely to suspect her existence, how much better for the Church! Sloth, for her, would be transposed from a deadly sin into a cardinal virtue.

"From the Vicar's wife, so I found during my little curacy, proceed half the silly, piffling rules for not getting drunk, or using swear words, or reading pernicious novels: all feelings are pernicious when she hasn't felt them. The human conscience is simply worn to a thread by all these isolated restrictions. The Church provides a way of healing for every conscience. We won't talk about that. You wouldn't understand."

"I would if you'd explain. My brain is equal to anything—with you at the levers."

"Amaza! I wish you'd let me take your life and——"

"And what, Sebastien?"

"Oh, nothing, never mind. Where was I with the Vicar's wife?" He pulled himself sharply up. He had nearly proposed to Amaza. That, apart from deeper motives, would be irrational to the last degree. Was he not slashing furiously at priestly marriages? It was his way, for the moment, of safeguarding himself. Vicars' wives had certainly been intolerable to him in his curate days. They had voted him extreme, bigoted, and all sorts of things. But they had not been quite so black as he was painting them. He reproached himself for this, even now; and would reproach himself more—when the situation was saved and he had walked out of the Russell Square house for ever and unattached. He would never look into Amaza's eyes again, after to-day. To-morrow he would scrub the black paint off the Vicar's wife; the paint that he was daubing on so recklessly. He would paint her—not white, but a good slate grey: something useful, yet to skilled sight slightly venomous.

"The married parson," he ran on, "will give you twenty reasons for his matrimonial lapse. He says

solemnly that the clergy must in duty marry and give sons to the Church. There is something smug about this. The sons of the clergy don't of necessity grow up with a fervour for Holy Orders. On the contrary, from the English Vicarage has issued some of the most pronounced Agnostics this age has seen. There is a screw loose somewhere in the parson's ingenious argument.

"Then he will say, 'How about entertaining?' He thinks he must have a wife as hostess at garden-parties; forgetting that he should by rights keep open house for the poor and needy, that his simple table should be the home of all appetites. He should have but a frugal loaf and share that with a beggar. Many priests still do; once they are cut adrift from the somnolent influence of the English Vicarage with its innocent roses—whited blossoms—and its full-sized tennis lawn. In my parish, there is an enormous Rectory; enlarged by a former incumbent with thirteen children. I'm going to turn it into a Community House.

"My dear Amaza,"—he looked at her again—the same bird-like alertness and placid attention—he turned his eyes away; they ached with staring at one spot of the gaily papered wall—"if a Saint came to life and begged for alms at the Vicarage back door the Vicar's wife would set the dog at him. For she presumes to give neat little dinner-parties: the cooking and the conversation are worse than at other tables. Clerical parties are always dull. Now dulness provokes people, whereas scandal merely sharpens their wits. There is honest merit in scandal."

"I must remember that and tell my stepmother. She is very dull; always dull. She is like cold soup, or a heavy omelette," sighed Amaza. "But don't let me interrupt you. It is all so very brilliant—the things that you are saying."

He shot a quick glance in her direction. Was she laughing at him or was she not?

Anyhow he would go on talking—and talking at his worst and most witty random. Talking was becoming for him already the complete cure. He could criticize Amaza now and feel vexed with her if she laughed at

him. When first he came into the room and looked in her face and held her hands, he had nearly fallen at her feet and clumsily blurted out his passion. There wasn't a pinch of criticism in his composition then. He had been too insipid; now, he was too pungent.

"The Vicar's wife," he declared bitterly, "has taken most matters into her own hands. She drives a coach and four stolidly through the Church's tradition and thinks what an excellent whip she is.

"The English Church is the good Catholics' Jerusalem. They weep for her, pray for her, yearn over her, have an undying love for and faith in her. Yet few respect her or ever can—until Bishops, for instance, give up advertising for under-footmen in the *Guardian;* until (to be even more revolutionary) some fanatic has made a bonfire of the English Vicarage. The tradition is so bad that you could not stay to spare the structure. Let us, then, plant potatoes for God's poor upon the tennis lawns."

"The Vicar's wife? What would you plant her with?"

Amaza looked quite pitiful. Already, the weather-cock, she was veering from Sebastien to the brow-beaten cleric's wife; for she was of constant compassion.

"In common charity"—Sebastien lightly shrugged, his fervid eyes still hard on the patch of wall paper—"I should plant her out in a nunnery. She is praiseworthy but pernicious. Her activities would be of genuine service if under proper control. There would be very little use for her tongue and a great deal of use for her hands. As for her brain, she would be robbed of the delusion that she had one. This is all very bitter. My blood is turned to gall, where it threatened to be fire."

He looked at Amaza again, then looked away. Those roses on the wall paper, by long staring, had turned, for him, into goblins of the most horrid sort!

"As for her position as a British Matron, it would become her skeleton in the closet," he concluded.

"You ought to have said her erstwhile position as a British Matron. The novels I used to read when I was a little girl were fond of the word 'erstwhile.' They were

Nurse's novels. You are talking like one now; only a little more up to date. You are cheaper than Mudie and less trouble, Sebastien. And I don't really think you have left a square inch of that unfortunate woman without a scratch, have you?"

He looked ashamed.

"I'm sorry—or I shall be to-morrow; when I've slept on her wounds. I'll buy a roll of sticking-plaster; but not until to-morrow."

"I wish you had said something about the clergyman himself. It would be only fair. Can't you think of any more?"

"I could say lots about him too. I will if you like. Shall I? Or would you rather I took myself off? Have you had more than enough?"

"Of course not. I demand another chapter." She appeared to be quite anxious.

"Very well, and the end of the chapter concludes the book."

"Oh no, don't, don't go," said Amaza, speaking suddenly, showing more feeling than throughout she had shown.

It touched him. Many a time in the Gardens out there, she had spoken and looked just so. She had confessed to him her perfect horror of solitude. Yet she couldn't be lonely in that wild, childish way now.

"But I must go soon. I've been here—for ever." He laughed constrainedly, looked at his watch and rattled on. It should be final.

"The parson doesn't want a wife, although he gives a dozen hollow reasons for having one. He has a vivid, a meteoric, a most poetic calling. It may be very comfortable to have his socks darned and his linen aired; yet a housekeeper darns and airs him just as well, or better. It may be soothing to have his sermons held up as literary models, but it is uncommonly bad for him. Hot tea, all ready; hot gossip, ready too, may be piquant when he comes in cold from parochial visiting, but they are no part of his marching kit. He is a soldier. He is sworn to poverty, to discomfort. That is why the married parson with a downright bad or an

absolutely indifferent wife is such a much finer specimen than the parson with a good one."

"I can understand cases like that," Amaza nodded intelligently. "No doubt the poor man married her for penance. I think you said—or didn't you?—that she was always plain. The Church believes in penance, the Conventicle doesn't. You explained that to me years ago. You were a very well informed boy, Sebastien."

"And you were a very absorbent girl, Amaza. I didn't say so, but she is plain.

"The parson will persist" (you could not switch him off this topic; Amaza relinquished the struggle, and it did not matter, so long as he stayed with her) "in regarding himself as a professional man. He wants a wife; just as the lawyer and the doctor and the business man and—sometimes—the poet has a wife: although the poet has the unhappy quality, often enough, of transforming his angel in the house into its devil. He is a chameleon creature; he wants change and must have it. But I'm not on poets; I'm on parsons—or rather, I'll take a parting shot at the parson's wife, then pack up my bows and arrows and retire. You see, Amaza, she is the sworn foe to the ascetic life. Women are. I heard a very devout girl say the other day that she did not wish to marry and never would—unless it were a priest."

"Did you give her your views?"

Was that a derisive twinkle in the quiet dark eyes?

Sebastien did not know; he had talked himself nearly past caring. To-morrow he would care a great deal—all ways. Yet to-morrow Amaza would have retreated into his fragrant and exquisite past; she would have no tangible foothold in his future. She would be holy and an ideal. Not even the pensive shadow of Amaza should be allowed to cast itself upon his far-away Rectory walls. Her little ghost would never walk the paths of his garden. He would not see reminiscent trails of her bright red hair in the sunset clouds. To his vision it should all be—just sunset! He would look at the sky, as a token for to-morrow's weather—no more!

"The Vicar's wife abhors ascetic tradition," he

gabbled on, blessing the good woman. "She confounds it with long hair, Socialism, Mr. Bernard Shaw, Papal claims, Continental cookery, smoking-carriages for ladies—a hundred most disreputable things. She is not quite sure that there does not still exist a statute against asceticism; just as there is against sheep-stealing—one of those things which has never been repealed."

Sebastien stopped. There must have been a regular gurgle and whirr going on inside him when he ran down. It would have been heard in the room; only our finite senses are so thick.

Amaza did not move. She remained; still, sweet, expectant. The chair on which she lightly perched—was it a nest?

Sebastien rose. He was going to get out of all this without delay. For plenty of other words were left in him yet. He had only run down on the one topic. There were words, of the fiery sort, which—once spoken—he would regret for all his days. Being a complacent young man, as all worthy young men must be, he concluded that, say he proposed to Amaza, she would accept. He held the masculine tenet—quite simply, without conscious conceit, "that any girl would marry any nice fellow."

Being young, he was bound to be complacent, and bound, therefore, to be the violent irritant of his aunt, and the bane of those unfortunate Vicars' wives with whom, so far, he had come in contact. He had not yet received the gift of Age. The years take from us with one hand and give more richly with the other. He put out his hand politely. Amaza looked at it.

"How absurd!" she said, and treated him to an airy shrug.

She wore a dull grey frock with a scarf round the shoulders. There was a bit of yellow at her throat, a daring touch for a red-haired woman; yet it was no bilious, sick canary shade, but showed flame to flame. She conserved all the tenderness of some faint fog—the thing you see at twilight on the Embankment sometimes, when the river wears amber at its breast. Her scarf fluttered as she moved; it was the dim, vibrating

sails of ships, he thought. To-day, Sebastien, fervid, bumptious and determined, could be not only spitefully voluble, but spoutingly poetic. His soul reached out and touched the extreme ends of itself. It never would again in just the same way.

"Why are you polite to me, Sebastien? It is ridiculous."

She laughed out loud. He had not heard her laugh since she was a child; not a laugh of this sort—unforced, clear-ringing and delightful. It had the silver tones of fog.

"Polite? Ridiculous?" he echoed in bewilderment. "What else would you like me to be?"

"Anything else. And do put your hand away. It looks as if we had met once and would never meet again."

"Well, that's about it." He put the offending hand into his pocket for the moment. "We have only met once; you see we were kids before, Amaza. And we shan't meet again, because I am going down to my parish."

"But you will come to London sometimes?"

Again she looked afraid of herself, of solitude. He felt so dangerously, so softly inclining to her.

"In twenty years, perhaps, when I'm famous." His face lighted. "I mean to be a big preacher, some day. You see."

"I'll come and listen." Her eyes were on him ardently. "Will it be at St. Jude's?"

"St. Jude's! No. It will be at St. Paul's Cathedral and on the drawing-room floor."

"The drawing-room floor?"

Amaza wore her seductive air of imbibing information.

"Some men—extreme men; and I shall be extreme—only preach in the crypt," he explained. "But I shall force the citadel. By that time I shall be forty-five—about. The age sounds arid; but they say the soil is fertile when you get there."

"You don't mean that I shan't see you until you are forty-five, and then only in a pulpit?"

"It will be better." He spoke gravely and the

absurdity of the proposition was lost upon them both. "You see, I shall be very busy in my parish, in my garden. Religion comes first."

"Gardens have no religion."

"Of course not." He sat down again, so did Amaza: the faint fall of the crape scarf about her shoulders betokened immense relief. "But they have flowers and vegetables. Also I have a great idea of encouraging poultry farming in the village, and must show the people how to do it. There is a great future for the countryman if he would only——"

"Lay eggs?"

"Yes, lay eggs, but by proxy. You are just as absurd as you always were, Amaza. You are delicious. There would always be laughter wherever you were."

"Would there? How nice! Yet there might be irritation. My stepmother says I drive a decent woman mad. I should be the sort of Vicar's wife who would have the hot tea and laughter all ready."

"Never mind Vicars' wives."

"But you minded them enormously five minutes ago, and, after all, you are going to be—you are— a Vicar."

"I'm a Rector."

"Is that more or less? Are the wives different?"

"Perhaps more, perhaps less. We won't waste time on the difference."

"No, don't let's. We are"—she looked in a startled way at the clock—"wasting time as it is. My stepmother and the Langfields will be in soon. When your aunt wrote and said you were passing through and would look us up to-day, my stepmother was very vexed to be away when you arrived. She is making a speech somewhere or moving minutes—what do they do?—at a drawing-room meeting in aid of——"

"I know the sort of thing." He made a gesture of weariness. "It is all so hollow."

"Isn't it? Like a meringue without the cream in. I'm glad we are agreed. It is always an advantage when people agree."

"Is it? But not if they don't meet between twenty-seven and forty-five?"

"I wish you wouldn't rub that in, Sebastien. It hurts me so."

She actually looked as much like crying as a grown-up girl could. Her manner distilled a positive whimper. It made Sebastien realize how lonely she was and always had been. And, taking a garden simile; since he had been thinking of his garden down in Dorsetshire, he concluded that the first man who came along with a fork would break up this frost of solitude. He would warm Amaza's heart and make it sweetly friable. This was not a comfortable conclusion for a man who was himself in love with her and had forsworn the use of the fork!

"I can't stay and see your stepmother," he declared, speaking almost rudely.

"She will be so cross, so slighted if you don't. Do, for my sake. She will sulk for days if she misses you. Their last words were, for they usually speak three together and say the same things, 'Be sure and don't let Mr. Gooch go away before we get back.'"

"Does she sulk for days?"

"She is pained for days. Her spirit is most sensitive; a rheumatic sort of spirit. When it leaves off jabbing her in one place it starts twinging in another."

"Afraid I can't turn myself into a liniment."

He grinned and stood up again after this cheap remark. He stuck out that stiff hand.

"Don't coax me to stay, Amaza?" he said quite beseechingly.

Amaza stood up too.

There was a subtle change in her manner; a little ripple on her perfect calm. It might be shyness, it might be sheer mischief. Sebastien did not know. He just perceived it and was disconcerted. With all his soul, he wished himself out upon the pavements; quite free and utterly desolate.

"There's one thing I want to say," she remarked. "I couldn't before because you've been so eloquent yourself. It's this. You really mustn't go into Dorsetshire and stay until you are forty-five. Why even when you do come back, you'll be half pulpit. I've been looking forward to you so much, Sebastien. I made up my

mind that you should fall in love with me. You know that down there in the Gardens"—she threw out her hand and signified them—"we said we would be married. You gave me a little ring out of a Christmas cracker. I've got it."

"But, Amaza——" he spluttered, and looked a positive baby.

"Of course we don't want to get married; not yet, anyway." She sat down again and wrapped the mantle of her calmness round her.

"Are you in love with me, Amaza?"

Sebastien sat down too and close. He appeared to be sinking into the cushioned arms of the most subtle temptation he had yet known.

"Not a bit. I'm immensely fond of you, but that isn't being in love, is it? I'd like you to have a tremendous passion for me. See? I might even marry you, if it was big enough. For it would be wonderful to be worshipped. Nobody cares a jot for me, as it is. I should have sensation and you would have possession, dear Sebastien. Think it over."

"You've got your head addled with fools of love-stories; that's all," he said violently.

For she was just playing ball with that precious jewel his heart.

Amaza shook her head.

"My feelings are most uplifted and pure," she insisted, "although my way of stating them may be hackneyed. But I should learn to be original in time."

"You are uncommonly original now. Look here, Amaza,"—he seized hold of her by the arm, with a double gesture of shake and crush—"can't you see, confound it all, that I am in love with you? And that before Heaven I won't let myself be? That is why I've been pitching into Vicars' wives all along. Amaza! Are you playing cat or dove, or both?"

"How could I play both? The cat eats the dove."

"There you are! Fiddling with words again. You always did. Are you, or are you not, in love with me? Come now—straight. Your stepmother and those white maggots of Langfields may come in at any moment."

"We used to call them white maggots, didn't we? And thought ourselves so clever. It wasn't, really, a bit. I can think of better things, and nastier, now. No, I'm not in love with you. But I'm immensely enamoured of the idea. I can't put it in any other way. I'm sorry if it sounds like a limp novelette."

"It sounds quite classic. Nero felt the same way."

"I'm glad to hear something nice of Nero. Although, indeed, his playing the fiddle—— By the way, Sebastien, Alice Griffin——"

"Oh perish Alice Griffin! If you are only in love with love, that is the mood of seven-eighths of the population. They pair off, get married and are wretched ever after. For the Church gives them no relief."

"There is a touch of the thumbscrew about your Church."

"No, there isn't." Sebastien moved away; he could be almost calm now that he had said the word "Church." "It's a question of whether you want to be happy here or somewhere else; for a little while or for ever. No human being makes another human being absolutely happy for very long. If they did, it would be idolatry. They'd lose God. Fortunately, there are always little empty corners felt in each heart."

"I understand a lot about empty corners; about God nothing at all," declared Amaza. "I gave that up when I felt off playing with bricks. To tell you the truth, Dr. Strip was my God and my Devil too. It sounds awful, but it's a positive fact."

(The Devil here suggested to Sebastien that it would be a righteous act to marry Amaza and convert her!)

He waved the Tempter aside, however, and started up feeling suddenly strong.

"I'm really going," he said. "You shan't play about with me any more, dear; claws or paws; cat or dove. I love you, Amaza, and I always shall. I didn't mean to say so, but you coaxed and lured me to it. Don't, whatever you do, ask me to stay and see your stepmother."

He put out his hand. Amaza, this time, took it. Very faintly she responded to the drama of the moment. Yet evidently, thought Sebastien bitterly, and dragging his

garden into use again for simile, "I'm not the man with a fork."

"I wish," she said gently, "that you wouldn't go and for so long. I wish you'd tell me more about your parish and all about the garden and about the eggs they'll lay."

This did Sebastien a great deal of good.

"I mean," he said quite solemnly, "to rebuild the tower of my church with eggs. It is an ancient church. There is a fortune to be made if you can get them perfectly new-laid to the London market."

"I'm glad you mean to be active and not preach all the time," she said gladly. (The sly mood was back, and he couldn't say whether she laughed at him or not.)

"I should hate to feel," she continued, "that you were the sort of clergyman one sees in plays. At least I don't see. I've never been inside a theatre. My father thought that theatres and cards were of Satan. I've lost my faith in Satan, but I respect my father's prejudices. The Langfields go to *matinées* and they tell me things."

"I'm not going to be that sort of footlight fool," Sebastien assured her. "Nor will I be a hectic or a stained glass kind."

His handsome face was white: this occasion, sprinkled about though it might be with verbal absurdities, was parting. He looked grim; yet, being the constant soldier, he looked gaudy.

He never quite knew, considering the matter many times in more years, how he really did go at the very last. There was no violent wrenching from Amaza—on her part, that is. Rather, she seemed to drift away; thus preserving her illusion of the river fog.

They went down the stairs together; the wide, dignified stairs that surely were built for a certain self-possessed drama. Sebastien considered this: he wondered how little men, going down little flights of stairs, just jerry built, felt at such a time. As for him, he was neither little nor jerry built!

Amaza wore her charming air of hovering, the manner he remembered very well in the childish past. He did not believe she was really grown up, although she was

so lily tall and had such masses of tightly-twined hair. She was a lily—a tiger lily. This—when he looked at her red head! When he surveyed her face, he said softly within himself the wonderful word "Madonna." She was just that sort of lily; most devout flower of the garden. She was pensive and pure, without mark. She was a child still, and that, perhaps, was the secret of the whole thing. Her belated juvenility had struck the queer chord of their conversation. He had never been so recklessly scandalous with his tongue before, and he felt, quite honestly, that for the rest of his days he must secretly lay votive offerings at the foot of the Vicar's wife; there would be a subtle joy in this imaginary penance—since she disapproved of votive offerings!

"I wish you wore an overcoat," Amaza said, when they arrived in the hall, "then I could brush it. I like to do things for people; it relieves me. When I was small I used to stand on this"—she touched a chair—"and brush my father's coat, before he drove off to Mummery's bank. I was awfully in love with him; I've always been in love with some one, ever since I can remember."

"And yet you say you're not in love with me," said Sebastien, injudiciously, with a cautious drop of the voice. Turvey's successor stood suddenly in the background.

"Oh, I shall be when you have gone, dear Sabastien. That is my way," returned Amaza cheerfully.

She watched him glumly open the door. Turvey's successor had tact and stood where he was. It was raining a little.

"I'm so afraid you'll get wet. Do take an umbrella," she implored.

Sebastien wanted to say—"Damn an umbrella"; but, of course, he mustn't. He simply remarked, "Wet! Bother! What does that matter?"

He went down the steps. He wouldn't even touch Amaza's hand at the last. To touch her tiniest finger-tip meant, at that moment—everything! It meant crushing the fog-crape scarf to a hopeless crumple;

it meant saying boldly and aloud before the second Turvey, "Amaza! I love you and will have you for my wife, whether you love me or whether you do not."

Instead of which, he descended to the sloppy street, looking sulky.

"Good-bye," said Amaza faintly. "Good-bye."

He turned round. She was looking awfully pensive, appallingly lonely. Sebastien would for ever remember that look upon her dear face. It told so much. It betrayed her deeper nature—the side of her which she hardly knew herself. Her childlike flutter of the topic, so he thought, had gone. Yet she called out, leaning towards the open air and the fine-falling rain—

"Sebastien!"

"Well—what?"

"I forgot to tell you. It will interest you, because you are going to live in the country. I have never been in the real country at all, to talk of; my boarding school was at a place they call a Spa. When Alice Griffin played the fiddle—don't look in such a hurry—other people played and sang too, of course. One woman was wonderful, and I heard some man in the row of chairs behind me say—

"'A voice like that would strike nightingales dumb.' Wasn't it——"

She broke off, with a confused sound and gesture; for he was gone. Indeed, this last frivolity was more than he could stand. All through she had been more than he could understand—but that was nothing. He could have mastered this subject—of Amaza—had he taken it up. Not a subject scholastic that he hadn't mastered yet! He was (as he had said of Amaza) absorbent. But to watch her wave these last little rags of frivolity—it was exasperating and not to be solved. Sebastien strode off.

He wasn't old enough to feel this odd love affair as cruelly as he might have done; yet he felt. It is a mistake to suppose that early youth does not feel at all. It was a young man in a mood of extreme suffering who stalked out of Russell Square and down Southampton Row into Holborn. Sebastien told himself that he

was horribly cut up, yet at forty-five he would have been in smaller and more deeply jagged pieces.

Forty-five, for him, meant—just a pulpit; just some measured triumph of the mind. That is the way of youth; to think its own stream swiftest. The older and the deeper torrents laugh cynically as they rush by.

He was cut up, yet his heart was only slashed at, whereas his pride was neatly severed. Amaza did not even love him. She may even have been laughing at him. He went away, went down to his distant Dorset parish, with the ancient, tumble-down church. All that he had of fervour and of beauty, he would proceed to pour over the shock heads of his parishioners. For all his life he would think of Amaza with constant tenderness; the very thought of her should make him wistful and warm, he would weave her memory into everything that was best.

All this he did not know—not yet; he did not know that the rarest of gifts was to be his: a something lovelier and more permanent than just a fretful marriage. He was not worthy; yet he had already been granted an abiding sorrow. About forty-five (the pulpit age!) he might be made aware of it, and then he would give his pain, transmuted, to the world. For, bumptious, young and self-centred though he might be—with short mental vision, as yet, with an inordinate high opinion of himself (as all the worthy young men!)—still he loved Amaza, and loved her in the big, best way.

When he was out of sight Amaza went up-stairs. The second Turvey watched her with interest; for he was young himself, and an affair of this sort is a human bond. He jumped, of course, to a hopeful and primary conclusion; there are no half-tones below stairs. He knew that a wedding meant tips.

She shut herself in the drawing-room and sat down by the fire. Her little airs and graces she took off and folded up—those verbal caprices that were no true part of her. They were just the make-up you put on for stage purposes; it would be ghastly if every soul wore its own complexion. As a rule we dab the paint on without knowing it.

She was swept through by those queer gusts of misery she had known since she was a child; the feeling you woke up with and without reason. "When I feel like that," she had once admitted to her father, "I try to persuade myself that it would be much worse if I had a wooden leg—or both wooden ones. But it doesn't make any difference. I haven't got yet to thanking God for the use of my limbs."

She wasn't thanking Him for anything. She was full of abstract misery. Sebastien had forsaken her. He had betrayed her—as all things and all people did betray. Her father had forsaken her, and now there was Sebastien. He was the second link in what would be a fairly long chain of betrayals.

Sebastien owned that he loved her; yet withheld this love and gave it for the enriching of a vague something which he said was higher.

She sat there asking her soul those thousand and one questions which it never would answer. Finally she went to the window and looked at the wet Square. The bit out of the old book came back and lilted in her head—

"*Life is the House and Man the Fruit of his own Choosing.*"

"I should like"—she stared at the red and white haunted house—"to be a soft something ripening upon a wall. Sebastien is a pineapple; lots of prickles, yet rather rare inside."

CHAPTER II

LONESOME-LIKE

When Mrs. Meeks and her daughters came in they exhaled a pleasing air of triumph. This was not lost upon Amaza; evidently something rather nice had happened. They had been patted on the head by a social superior. Usually they moved through a cloud of dulness and nagging; so that she really was Cinderella, translated from a fairy tale into the respectable round of a genteel Square.

"Where is Mr. Gooch?" demanded the stepmother vivaciously, and staring about the room, from corner to corner; as though he might be playing bo-peep behind the curtains.

Amaza knew that laboriously juvenile manner. It was displayed for the advantage of eligible young men: moreover, when Mrs. Meeks had a rare attack of good spirits, the household paid handsomely for it afterwards.

"He's gone," she said.

"Gone! Good gracious! What excuse did he make?"

"None, dear. He put it in the form of a plea. Let me take your furs; sit in this chair close to the fire." Amaza rose and betrayed her air of demure service. "He said, 'For goodness' sake don't ask me to stay and see your stepmother.' I think he was upset."

"What about?" Mrs. Meeks rustled aggressively.

"Vicars' wives. He has suffered with them."

"But I'm not a Vicar's wife."

The Langfields, Rose and Violet, added reproachfully, "Mamma is not a Vicar's wife."

The stepmother surveyed Amaza with distrust.

The girl was an idiot; you could tell that by looking at her. Eyes so wide apart and brows always lifted gave

a silly air. Yet foolish people managed to get the point of their weapon through your armour. Mrs. Meeks felt that she had been snubbed by Sebastien—probably by him and Amaza in collusion. She detested being snubbed, because she was accustomed to it. The Square held to the opinion that Amaza's father had made a fool of himself by his second marriage.

"He will suffer with one Vicar's wife all his days," she said, putting on the air of oracle.

"Which Vicar's wife?"

"His own, of course."

"Oh—his own." Amaza smiled, in that detached manner that made you want to hit her. "He is never going to marry. We talked about it for two hours, and then he went away suddenly."

"Did he?" asked Mrs. Meeks.

Her voice and her eyes were crisp. It was a mother's most holy duty to get her girls off her hands; therefore, every young man ended in Violet or Rose. If Sebastien, who would inherit a fortune from his sour old Evangelical aunt, did not take Violet or Rose, he was welcome to Amaza: to marry was the main use of men.

"What nonsense," she cried, recovering her air of good humour. "He calls himself a celibate priest, doesn't he? I know the sort. We meet them on Committees sometimes. Thanks to Oliver Cromwell, that unnatural habit was swept out of England hundreds of years ago, and now-a-days clergymen have larger families than any one else. Young Mr. Gooch's aunt assured me that Oxford had knocked the nonsense out of him."

She spoke with shine and blare—as an east wind. She was so wholesome. She breathed hard and sat with her knees apart. It was a vulgar attitude; even Rose and Violet wished sometimes that she would not do it. Yet, when moved, she always did. This was a moving moment.

"He'll marry some girl with a little money before long. You see," she continued, staring at Amaza, who would have two hundred a year to do as she chose with when she was twenty-one. "He must marry. That

old aunt may live for years and leave her money to Lost Dogs at the last. She is just that kind of person. There are very few fat livings in the Establishment now-a-days, and the one she has presented to him is poor. She told me so herself. She told me too that the bishop who ordained him, a most fatherly old man, said, 'Now you have only to make a good marriage and you are provided for.' Did he tell you that?"

"No. He is too loyal to bishops. But he thinks, at least he did think long ago, that they do a great deal of harm by being on the loose——"

"Amaza!"

"Yes—what?"

"'Loose' and 'tight' are horrid words."

"Are they? I am sorry. But Sebastien did say something of the sort when he was young. He said strange things. I wrote them down in a book and learnt them. He would like to keep bishops in cells, for meditation. They would be led out sometimes for the mysteries of their religion—to confirm, to ordain and to bless things. They are magicians in a way. It seems wonderful."

"It seems a pack of nonsense, and I wish you'd ring for tea. Didn't you give him any?"

"I never thought of it."

Amaza penitently rang the bell. When the butler appeared, she said in a subdued way—

"Tea, please, Turvey."

And, since her stepdaughter could say or be nothing but an irritant, Mrs. Meeks snapped out before the door was shut—

"I wish your father hadn't instituted that absurd rule of calling this new butler Turvey. One might as well be waited on by a ghost."

"All butlers are Turvey when they are not Huckson," Amaza told her gravely, and helping Rose off with her coat.

When the tea came she poured out. Mrs. Meeks, after sipping, handed back her cup.

"You haven't given me enough sugar," she said; "you never do."

"I never can." Amaza proffered the bowl. "Did you

have a nice meeting? You must have had; you all looked so happy when you came in. You looked as Nurse looked when Huckson kissed her first. I've quite made up my mind that he did kiss her that day; kissing and squeezing go together."

(Nurse, since her translation to the married state, had so twitted Amaza on this incident that the Sunday escapade had become family tradition.)

"Amaza! You say the most improper things."

"I'm sorry; and I'm always being sorry without knowing why. Tell me about the meeting."

She smiled engagingly from face to face and caught no answering smile. For they all disliked her, and they were all genuinely shocked. Their crust of purity was so thin that they didn't dare dance on it.

"It was a most improving meeting,"—Mrs. Meeks put on her moral manner—"and it was also a delightful surprise. A very old friend of mine was there. We hadn't met for years, but I knew her at once. She doesn't seem to have aged a bit. She has kept her figure."

She sighed and looked down at her ample skirts.

"You would have kept yours, mamma, if you had taken exercise," her girls said.

"My dears, I couldn't take your sort of exercise; it is so dangerous. Why, only last winter a member of the hockey club was hit full in the chest by a ball."

"It didn't matter." Rose looked scornful and emancipated—she and her sister cared for nothing but games and good works. "She was in splendid condition and had muscles like a man."

"Girls who play games have." Amaza looked affectionately at the straight shirts and neat ties of her step-sisters. "It is a provision of Providence."

Mrs. Meeks, who, as she grew older, became fonder of dresses and fonder of eating, took rich cake in bulk. She hated that bright air of innocence which Amaza displayed. And, at the back of her mind, she regretted that her own girls were not what she called feminine. Only last week at a charity dance, she had overheard Violet's partner say to another young man—

"It was like waltzing with a wet umbrella."

Men didn't marry umbrellas, wet or dry!

"I don't approve of so much exercise," she said quite crossly. "Give me another cup of tea, Amaza, and more milk this time, please."

"But, mamma, it is to exercise that Lady Leith owes her figure."

"Is Lady Leith your friend?" Amaza gave the cup back; cup with one hand, jug with the other. "Take as much milk as you can."

"Yes, a very old friend. She was Mrs. Leith when I knew her, and I was Mrs. Langfield."

She always looked pensive when she spoke of the late Langfield. It was a pose which broke Amaza's heart and set her brain on fire.

"Her husband got knighted for doing something or the other," the stepmother flowed on, unaware of the quick storm she had provoked. "And there she was this afternoon making a speech."

"What about?" asked Amaza.

"The British Women's Temperance Society. If you would take a little more interest in serious matters——"

"Oh, but how sad! And is it really necessary?"

"Necessary! Any sacrifice is worth while if it raises the tone of the world."

"Of course. I was only hoping that it wasn't bad enough to be a big sacrifice for the British Women. What a nice talk you must have had with Lady Leith."

"Delightful." Mrs. Meeks relaxed; she was more obtuse than her girls—they remained lean and cold; regarding Amaza with a faint blue stare.

They had not changed since they were children. Their bodies remained flat and unprofitable, their souls were not out of the shell. And, in spite of the games which they played at every possible moment, and in which they excelled so much that they had won various hideous silver trophies, their faces looked flabby. You would have taken them for women who constantly eat hot buttered buns in an even hotter room. In early youth they had been pink-skinned; now they were white—yet white touched up by the London smuts; in age

they would be sickly buff—and there was an end of them.

Their mother said to other matrons, "My girls look fragile although they are so splendidly athletic. It is their type." Mothers are so clever with words. Had they been sallow and scrawny, she would have said, "They are dark and dainty." Mrs. Meeks was a fond mother and that was her only good point. As for the Langfields, they hadn't a good point between them. Everything was as it should be in the Russell Square house: it followed the conventional lines of domestic drama. Amaza was downtrodden; her step-relatives were quite worthless.

"Delightful," repeated Mrs. Meeks, "and left so well off too. Her dear husband had a stroke three years ago. He was dead within the day; no expensive, wearing long illness at the last. She was most warm, and she insists on our going down to spend Christmas with her in Surrey. It is a large house and only a little way out."

"I'm sure I shall not like it," said Amaza promptly, looking round the room.

"My dear, you weren't included. I thought that if Mrs. Huckson could be persuaded to come and look after things——"

"I'm delighted not to go," interrupted Amaza—yet flinching because a door had been banged full in her face. "And I don't want Nurse. I can look after myself."

"You must have Mrs. Huckson. It wouldn't be proper else. But there is plenty of time; three weeks to Christmas yet."

"There are wonderful golf-links quite near," said Rose and Violet together, and speaking as you speak of a lover. "In fact, the house stands on them."

"And she lets it for twenty guineas a week in the summer," added their mother. "Although she is so rich, she has an eye to the main chance. I wish"—she sighed and her knees spread wider; Amaza knew just what was coming—"we could get this house off our hands, and take a nice place in the country."

She said this certainly six times in every month.

It was the dream of the three to live in the country; yet not too far—some place with a *matinée* train, so that they could run up for philanthropic dissipations. They would then be quite happy; helping in the parish and playing games: hockey in the winter—sometimes; and sometimes golf; tennis in the summer, badminton between whiles, parlour games through the long winter evenings, rummage sales to arrange and village concerts to sing at. They would be invaluable at that kind of thing; since what they all three most dreaded was contemplation. Directly they left off talking or tearing about, they looked at each other with furtive apprehension. The Langfields promised to turn into what Sebastien had long ago called "Lutheran frumps." There are lots in every country parish.

"She has," Mrs. Meeks continued transparently, "two sons. They will be down from Cambridge at Christmas. Both of them are going into the Church, but they haven't any silly and extreme views. One may be a school-master, although nothing is settled. You get a much better appointment as the Reverend Something. They will be quite well off when their mother dies, but she can't bear the idea of any one loafing about. The other son will start as a curate, of course; she says he is splendid at games, and that is what country curates are for. Both her boys are Broad."

"Sebastien once said that the Devil was Broad."

"That is profane! As if the Devil could have religious views. It seems to me that Mr. Gooch is not only profane, but a prig too."

"Yes, I think," agreed Amaza, looking vague and evidently trying to define the word very conscientiously —in justice to Sebastien—"that he is a prig. He sounded like it. I shall always be fond of him, if he is as broad as the Thames or as narrow as one of those club croquet hoops. He knows that."

"Does he?" asked the stepmother, staring.

Her eyes were exactly like the cut jet buttons on her matron's handsome mantle. And, since her ethics of love coincided with the second Turvey's, she concluded that Sebastien must have proposed and—equally of

course—Amaza must have accepted him. For, she was now with Sebastien himself, any girl would accept any nice fellow.

The Langfields were staring coldly. The only use they had for young men was to knock about balls together. They sometimes danced with young men; yet always under protest: it soon became a double protest, so they weren't tempted often. They only went to charity dances because of the good it would do and the excellent example it set. Amaza steadily refused to go to dances at all; her father had not approved of them. He had come straight down the stream of Puritanism, unsullied, from the sixteenth century. "You are," she had once said, hugging him hard, "a Pilgrim Father." Sebastien, who was well informed and most intelligent, had told her all about the voyage of the *Mayflower*, concluding piously that he wished some one had scuttled the ship. Sebastien never had a good word to say for Puritanism. He insisted that the stream was muddy from the source.

"You said, Amaza, that he wasn't going to marry."

"No more he isn't."

"What a very childish way of putting it," said Violet and Rose, speaking together, with a twin curl of the lip. They disliked all talk of marriage. It was not modest.

Their mother knew their mind on this matter, and she anticipated trouble with them before they were off her hands. She regarded them as tar or treacle; and was determined, for her own reputation as a managing matron, to be quit of them. As aids to the cleansing process, she proposed to enrol Lady Leith's two Broad Church boys. She was the type of woman who considered that not to marry was to be subtly disgraced.

Now Amaza was a different girl altogether; this made her dislike Amaza more than she otherwise would have done. Yet she did her duty; this she had decided from the first. Duty took the form of choosing elaborate and beautiful frocks for Amaza, who was always poetically dressed, and, as Mrs. Meeks complacently said, "paid for dressing." Yet, when it came to the actual cost, she

considered that she paid; since her stepdaughter's two hundred a year trickled into the family exchequer. She would not be twenty-one until May.

Regretfully, she came to the conclusion that Rose and Violet were not attractive girls; worse, they did not wish to be. This amounted to a hopeless condition, yet she left no stone unturned through the three weeks that came between to-day and the departure for Lady Leith's. She dragged her daughters to dressmakers and milliners perpetually; good works were in abeyance. For her part, she used them merely as a social and a matrimonial lever. You met people at meetings; you met, if not young men, at least their female relatives.

She, as she put it, slaved herself to death for Violet and Rose, and so far to no purpose. Violet was twenty-three, Rose a year younger; neither of them had turned a single masculine head. And as likely as not they would presume to reject a first proposal: that was the arrogant way of your plain young woman.

They, meanwhile, though submitting to be gowned and elegantly corseted, thought more of golf-clubs than confections. Amaza watched it all, maintaining her air of colourless aloofness. She accompanied the three to those mysteries known as "fittings." She went with them sometimes to concerts and sometimes to pay calls. She led the empty life of the ordinary upper middle-class girl; changing books at Mudie's, staring now and then into shops, going, more regularly than ever before, to St. Jude's on Sundays. The service there was high and crusted, and when the Rector spoke of "the services of the church," which he frequently did, he meant Matins for the well-to-do and Evensong for their servants. Sebastien's Rector, who was a scholar and a devotee, had died. This was a new young man. Amaza used to watch him and think of Sebastien. She would always think of him, and, for the present, he was the dominant ingredient in her life. It was a life without a ripple; it was placid, turgid almost. Yet the craving—the hunger for she knew not what—was lying underneath. And her eyes, as ever, kept searching.

Mrs. Meeks, intent on well-gowned matrimony for

her own two girls, never suspected that Fate was sending her to Lady Leith's for quite another purpose and that the Festival was for Amaza.

Court dressmakers were cutting out garments for the Langfields; Fate was setting the first stitches in that many-shaded garment which should be Amaza's wear.

She watched her stepmother and step-sisters depart. Mrs. Meeks was voluble, perhaps remorseful, at the last. During breakfast—they were starting soon after—she looked more than once at Amaza's mother above the hearth. Subtle, sly face—it had mocked her many times! Those eyes had pierced even her complacence! She would have burned the portrait (or, better, put it up for auction, since it had been done by a good man and would certainly fetch money), but it had been the last wish of Amaza's father that it should hang where it was. "So that Amaza can see her mother," he had said. That woman won the victory all along the line—to the second wife, the dead were quite departed. Mrs. Meeks had not loved her second husband—love with her was a diluted fluid, and the late Langfield had drunk it to the last drop: but Conquest was a strong brew, and she hated to take second place in any heart which she laid her hands upon.

Nevertheless, being not a bad woman, but just the usual coarse one, she reproached herself for leaving Amaza alone, and all the more because Lady Leith, by hospitable afterthought, had written including the girl—and one had prudently burned the letter. For you can't make two young men go round between three young spinsters.

She reproached herself, and she had made amends, according to her lights, by ordering in extra things for Amaza to eat.

"You'll have the turkey, dear, just as usual on Christmas Day," she said heartily, chipping a second egg and looking at the clock. "The carriage will be here in ten minutes, girls. And the pudding and mince-pies, Amaza. I've settled everything with cook. And I should go to church on Christmas morning, if I were you; it is always so cheerful."

"I shall be quite cheerful, and I might go to the Conventicle."

"My dear! Don't be seen coming out of that place; but—there, it won't be open."

Mrs. Meeks dropped her table napkin, stooped to pick it up and emerged over the rim of the table looking purple. The fate of the fresh-coloured brunette had overtaken her; at forty-eight she was the colour of those plums that it would be dangerous to eat.

"You sound as if it were a corner pub." Amaza slid her chair back and stood up.

That hair of hers. It was hideous—and wonderful! She stood in a fine red fire. Mrs. Meeks looked at Violet and Rose, with their heads of good dull Sussex clay. You might plough those heads! It wasn't very often she thought such silly thoughts.

"Amaza! A corner pub!"

"They are very disreputable," the girl returned coolly. "I heard Turvey say so. Not this Turvey; the real one. And Sebastien says that our dear fiddler—do you remember the fiddler?"—she turned a touch scornfully to the Langfields—"oh, of course you wouldn't, why did I ask?—was always in and out of one. It must have been the Cosmo Place one. He died of drink. So did the charwoman from Tibbald's who used to scrub the front steps when we were small. She was a dear. She used to give me brandy-snaps; they got soft in her pocket. All the best people die of drink. Her favourite tipple (that's another of Turvey's words, and it seems to trouble you) was porter. Nurse said it was a low drink; now champagne she could understand."

"Nobody could hope to understand you," said the Langfield girls together. And, indeed, how could one! She said perfectly depraved things, looking meanwhile like an ice queen.

The Langfields could only accomplish an isolated remark (apart from their mother, that is, and apart from their burning topic of balls) when given the lead. Hand them an end of string and they would primly wind.

The three marched out of the dining-room together. Amaza was left to the wreck of dirty tea-cups and broken

egg-shells : these—and bacon rinds and the smell of fish ; all the flotsam of a "good table." Her relatives had the honest appetites of men.

She was left before long to the desolate opulence of the entire house. It was terrible ; until she went to look at her real mother's portrait. Then, looking at her father's, too, she pretended that they were all three living together in sweet family unity. Nevertheless, you wanted some one of beating heart and racing red blood to talk to. Talking to oneself led to madness, so she had heard. Amidst a host of positive terrors, there had lurked at the back of her all her life, the ghastly supposition of "suppose I went raving mad and wore a strait waistcoat ?" She laughed aloud now—for she knew that her stepmother would do her duty by her to the very asylum door : she would debate on the cut of the waistcoat.

Mrs. Huckson had engaged to come by tea-time. That would be nice. You wouldn't want her with you all the time ; when done with, she could be dismissed to the kitchens. There was no housekeeper's room. Mrs. Maxwell had been pensioned off and Amaza's stepmother kept house for herself. She was a notable woman in this way, and her eyes flashed into every corner with the candour of a policeman's lantern. In consequence, her servants frequently gavê her notice, and she was in the habit of putting in pleasing mornings at Mrs. Mount's—that lady's registry having the chief control of the market. Mrs. Mount had made a positive corner in cooks.

Amaza went out for a walk. It was a bright December day, and she became possessed with a spirit for adventure. It was really rather wonderful to feel that the whole world was before you, that you could do as you chose, that you had pounds in your pocket. She went out of the quiet region of Squares, through Hanway Street and into Oxford Street. She walked fast and looked radiant : people stared at her. The sun, still shining, rioted in her red hair. Altogether, she was a striking-looking girl and in sore need of a Mrs. Huckson : the more innocent the girl, the more burning need for a Mrs. Huckson.

It was getting dark when she returned to Russell Square; the dim, thick dusk, which was so beguiling, so wonderful and so sad! At this hour you felt your strongest sense of immortality.

Nurse was waiting and evidently, as she would have put it, "sitting upon pins."

"My dear,"—she kissed Amaza—"I wondered where on earth you was."

"Am I late? It was so splendid out of doors; so strong. I walked an extra glass of wine. Do you know, Nurse?"

She laughed, slipped off her beautiful sables—they had been her mother's—and sat down.

"Do I know! Well, my lamb, if it's drink you mean, I should say nobody knows better."

"Has he been doing it again? What a shame."

"He's always doing it, Miss Amaza, and not what you might call downright indecent drunk and be done with it. I could stand that. I should know where I was. But it's all on the nip, nip, nip, and his beastly temper's past bearing with. If it wasn't for the lodging-house I'd leave him."

"Well, you have left him for a little while. You shall have a cup of tea up here with me." Amaza loitered to the bell.

"Wait a bit, my dear,"—Mrs. Huckson caught her skirt and drew her back, gazing at her affectionately—"that's just what I've come about. I can't stay, Miss Amaza. I don't know what she'll say, and I don't care; it's you I'm thinking of. For it's worried me more than enough."

"She" was Mrs. Meeks: Nurse had virtuously said from the first, "I never have give her a handle to her name and I never will, while my name's Murray." (When her name changed to Huckson, her resolve remained.)

"What's worried you more than enough? Huckson?"

"Oh, it's always Huckson. He's too well off and too well looked after, that's what he is. I never ought to have married him. I had my misdoubts more than once before the wedding, and if I hadn't give notice and got

my things together, and marked, mind you, in my married name, wild horses wouldn't have drove me to the altar with that man."

"You can take a horse to the water, but he needn't drink," said Amaza aimlessly.

She looked at her nurse. She remembered that Sunday afternoon long ago, and the uplifted mood. Did dreams die so? Nurse had trodden a golden Square that day, and all her glances were to Heaven.

"Well, the long and the short of it is, Miss Amaza, that I can't leave the brute for more than a couple of hours together. It would have been right enough if we hadn't let the first floor, and I *was* hoping for a quiet time over Christmas. But just as luck would have it, two gents, Americans they said they was, come in yesterday and took the rooms right off, for three months certain. Once I take my eye off Huckson, he'll be getting downright drunk and insulting them. And there's half a year's rent as good as gone. For, of course, they ain't going to stand his ways. I've got to."

"And how soon do you want to go back home?" asked Amaza.

Her voice was so quiet that she noticed it herself. A great terror and a big relief took their turns with her. She was going to be alone; quite alone—save for the speechless company of two ghosts who had loved her. On the other hand, she was going to be quite free. London was the ball at her foot. She fleetly considered London—as a ball, as a key—to romance; as a portal, as a silver stream—on which you might, unchecked, sail to your vague desires. Her hands were clenched fast in her lap. Her eyes were fathomless. Nurse was considering "she's grown a handsome girl, but how staring that hair is." And knowing, as she did, that handsome girls, even red-headed ones, were vulnerable, she wondered if she ought in duty to consign Huckson to his positive drunkenness, and take her post by Amaza: to screen her from intangible dangers.

Huckson won, as of course he would. Drink was a definite thing; it might empty a lodging-house, or, worse, set it on fire. It might break the best dinner-

service or throw silver spoons into the dust-bin. She could not realize the particular and most enticing drunkenness which might become Amaza's. She stood up.

She was not in the least like the typical Nurse; the buxom Somebody borrowed from Shakespeare. She was bleached and angular and most fashionably dressed; as she knew fashion. Her coat and skirt was made mainly of buttons and straps; that being the prevailing idiocy of the moment. Her hat, which she had put on slightly crooked, was wreathed with flowers and alive with rakish bows. In the middle of it there stood a thing like an attenuated shaving-brush, and this she fondly called an osprey.

Amaza, rather impressed by the complexity of the hat, affectionately set it at the proper angle.

"Must you go at once?" she asked quite eagerly. "Won't you even have some tea?"

"I don't really think, my dear, that I'm safe for as much as a cup of tea. I came off just anyhow." She picked a cotton off her skirt. "He was soaking in his pantry and didn't know I was gone. If I leave him with the girl long he'll nag her into giving me notice, and there'll be a nice thing over Christmas. For you can't get girls in a lodging-house, I find."

She kissed Amaza again. There was regret in her manner, just as there had been regret in the step-mother's. Vaguely, they both felt as if they were throwing things to the lions.

"But," said Nurse to herself, as she flashed back towards Jermyn Street in a motor-omnibus, "she's a lady born, and ladies born don't get into mischief, they only get lonesome-like. I wouldn't trust any girl that wasn't a lady born in a big house there by herself. I wish poor old Turvey was alive. Now, he would have been even more than a father."

* * * * * *

It was a very big house, and the new Turvey, for all the English name with which they had endowed him, was German born, by the name of Leider. It was one of Mrs. Meeks' economies to get her men-servants from a foreign registry. They came for next to nothing, to

learn the language: and the patois they picked up from the different kitchens must have given them a varied idea of the English tongue.

Amaza dined alone. She thought she might like it enormously when she got used to it: you attained to your most violent appetites through an initial distaste. She sent Turvey—*alias* Paul Lieder—away with the sweets. She sat with both elbows on the table eating Charlotte Russe. There was enough in the dish for several people. The chairs round the table demanded that people should sit in them, and eat and laugh—and be devoted to one. She was a glutton for devotion: glutton and spendthrift.

"I wish Sebastien might come and stay," she said out loud, and looked at her mysteriously smiling real mother.

One was really an unfurnished room for the present. Plenty of space, other people's gimcrackeries removed. The beat of her heart felt hollow.

"I must get some things," said Amaza, speaking out loud again, "and fill myself up."

There was no reason why she shouldn't give little parties. Alice Griffin might come and bring her fiddle. Alice Griffin was famous and would not!

There were the Okeys; yet one had never reputably known the Okeys.

There were the Mallards. She hated Cordelia, and Humphrey was social, with spots. He would not come either; he would vote it dull. "Everything is dull which is not disreputable," Cordelia had said bitterly of her big brother.

Well, taken altogether, you couldn't call Alice Griffin, or the Okeys, or the Mallards—furniture! Also, as a general rule, when you bought furniture you bought it new. Now the Okeys and the Mallards were distinctly second-hand, and shoddy at that.

Here was an idea; a thought to dream and dally with. London was full of the most charming human furniture—if only one knew the way to the shop; and which shop!

It was marvellous (it was also most melancholy; sitting here splendid and alone) to realize that all around you were the most luxurious chairs, the most subtly

designed tables; with extra flaps, with cunning inlay; the most beautiful secretaire bookcases with secret drawers, the most delicious little slim things of sorts, for holding ornaments. There were glasses in which you might catch the reflection of your own soul.

London was just a big shop of brains and hearts and souls: an enormous place, far bigger than the Okeys' father's shops all put together. Yet the shutters were not taken down, and it did not appear that they would be. She was alone.

She finished her dinner and went up-stairs. The long glass between the two long windows of the drawing-room betrayed a beautiful young woman in a thin black frock that shimmered and was sinuous. Amaza still loved black; it emphasized her loss. As yet, her father was the man she loved best, in this world or any other. She was destined to love different men, yet merely as the possible solace. Mrs. Meeks encouraged the touch of daughterly sentiment because well-chosen black went so wondrously with blazing hair. She disliked Amaza, she resented her; yet found a pleasure in looking at her when she wore the right frock and fitments.

Amaza sat down near the fire, and she spread her hands. In a spirit of mournful caprice she had slipped upon her little finger the ring from a Christmas cracker which Sebastien had given. It was too small to go upon any other finger.

A book was in her lap, but she could not read the usual vapouring novel from the library. She preferred to sit and think of all the charming intrigues in which one might indulge—would they but take the shutters down! Intrigue with her was simply a mental process. Of bodily sweets and bodily bitters (that Heaven and Hell which stand so near) she knew nothing at all.

She picked up one book, then another, then a third; she put them down. One was of far travel, another danced on the edge of the matrimonial problem, a third was pretty and attenuated. Love stories and stories of adventure were well enough; yet you got tired of reading about such things. You wanted to go to the places and meet the people—and face the problems and feel your

own pulse beat. Second-hand moods were vulgar. She wondered if the men and the women who wrote the books got tired too; if they also longed ardently for a breath of the real to blow over them. Or had they once lived the real and were these books just the echoes of a voice?

Two or three days and nights went on; she walked in a dream. The immediate past was washed out, and she could not imagine that her stepmother and the Langfields were coming back in a week or so. Their very letters (and they, of course, wrote to her most conscientiously) appeared to be meant for other people. She could not endure the idea of the triple return. For she hated them all. Absence is the sure test of love and of hate. You do not know until you get away. The longer you are away, the more serene your certainty.

Christmas morning came and she went off to St. Jude's. It stung her pride to know that the very servants regarded her with pity. Only her feet were on a level with the faces which crowded together at the kitchen window—yet in her soul she saw the sympathy in those shallow eyes.

"I will not be pitied," she said furiously to herself, as she hurried through the Squares, as she stamped upon the very stones. It was a thing you could not forgive: that people should dare to feel sorry for you.

The service at St. Jude's was very bright and holly-wreathed. Amaza had that nature which is instantly made wretched by organized cheerfulness. She pitied herself more than ever as she went back to Russell Square. It was such an ignominy, such an odium, to be alone on Christmas Day.

"I must certainly furnish myself," she said whimsically—and felt so desperate that, on the merest pretext, she would have travelled to Jermyn Street and spent Christmas with Nurse—even though it meant sitting in the pantry with the degraded Huckson himself.

Christmas to Amaza meant not the Holy Child and His Mother, but just a time of earthly festivities. Dr. Strip had been a logical Dissenter of the old school and held firmly to the view of original Puritans: that the

fasts and festivals of the Church were Popish. A terror of Popery is the seed of all schism.

Christmas meant presents and feasting and the flowing together of friends; nothing more. As Amaza went, desperate and all on fire, homewards, every street was hollow and every house a hive.

She spent the most rebellious afternoon of her life. Certainly something must be done. Once she nearly went to the Mallards' (who had gone to live in Portland Place), and once she nearly went to the Okeys', and once she nearly went to Albert Hall Mansions where Alice Griffin was living with an aunt in a flat of her own. She had spoken to Alice Griffin after the concert at Queen's Hall.

Just before the alien Turvey announced that her Christmas turkey waited below she decided that to-morrow morning she would start off to Sebastien. The name of his parish she did not know. But one could go to Dorset and track him down, and then say to him, "Sebastien, I am so lonely." Never had she been able to bear loneliness alone. And to be by yourself—of the body—that was one thing; and a sad thing: to feel that your very soul was shut in by barbed wire—it was maddening. She quite gravely regarded the near possibility of that strait waistcoat.

After dinner on Christmas night, she put a long cloak over her trailing frock and sneaked out of her house. The servants were singing.

What a good-tempered, coarse rabble it was! What would they all say if she ran down the kitchen stairs, broke the ring round the fire, made of herself the extra link?

That would be a loneliness even more alone than this!

She stood in the Square. It was a placid and a jewelled night—beautiful! The very air was holy. Amaza looked up at the stars. The secrets of Eternity dwelt above the skies. Every house was lighted and loud. They hummed with happiness, the houses.

She went round and round the Square; watching the marvel of clear stars and bare boughs. She peered into the Gardens: to-morrow she would certainly start off

and find Sebastien, for he loved her. Say Sebastien sent her back, say he clung to his vague and icy something higher—the queer thing he called his Faith! She had not forgotten that Sebastien had failed her the time before.

She walked like a hunted thing, listening to the noise —of feet, of music, of voices—that came from every house. At dawn to-day it had rained heavily. To-night, there were puddles left below the curbstones.

You saw the golden stars in those puddles. Christ and His Mother meant nothing at all; nothing consoling at which you might clutch—no Breast on which you might lean, no Heart which, beat for beat, met your own anguish, and your constant strange desires. Yet she remembered the beautiful Bible stories of the Manger and the Magi. No one else seemed to remember them to-night. The revelry from the houses met, joined hands, made a chain of joyful profanities all round the Square.

Amaza bent, to see the shining stars in all the puddles. She remained huddled up, half kneeling, half happy.

Some one said presently, and it was a very nice voice—

"Are you looking for anything? Can I help?"

He appeared extremely nice to look at and to listen to. The starlight glorified him. To meet her mood this should have been an Angel.

"I am always looking," she said very simply.

He had never before heard such a simple voice, nor had he seen such a striking girl.

Yet, for more years than he cared to count, he had listened to voices and looked at girls.

CHAPTER III

DISTRACTING DAYS

He was a gay brute of no subtleties, and he asked quite naturally—

"What for?"

Amaza shrugged. She arose and looked at him with a glance he could not understand: so he put his own construction.

"Oh, if I knew for certain, I shouldn't be looking. I should have it."

"Then you haven't lost anything?"

"No." She felt on her finger for Sebastien's childish ring, a thing of gilt and glass.

It had fallen out, how neither just knew (at least, Amaza did not), that they were walking round the Gardens together, and that presently they crossed the muddy road, and walked upon pavements in the streak of light thrown by the houses.

The man looked down at Amaza's satin shoe as she lifted her skirt. He looked up at the regal head, wreathed in fire; that was beaten to the finest thread, covered lightly with a lace scarf. He could not see or say to himself these things, he simply thought, "Lovely red hair—and what lots!"

He was wise with adventures and remarkably weary; yet this one, because, already, he could not in the least make it out, rejuvenated him, pumped new blood into the failing pulses. Here was a woman, very young, yet of the sort that mattered.

Sir Walter Wintle was no angel (such as Amaza's mood had demanded), but a battle-stained man of the world far nearer fifty than he cared to admit. He had for the last thirty years been consistently dissolute in the

worst way: which means the prudent, moderate and perfectly heartless way. He quietly boasted that he knew women through and through, yet this one, he reflected, certainly had floored him from the first glance. He was filled with bewilderment, excitement and distrust. He could not say whether he had stumbled across utter innocence or the last word in finished effrontery. Ends meet and all things make a ring. Perfect innocence, consummate guile, they look alike to blunted vision.

"What are you doing in the Square alone at night?" he asked in a downright way.

"I got so tired of staying indoors alone, and on Christmas night, too. How would you feel if they brought up a whole turkey for you to eat all by yourself?"

He laughed. It was a nice laugh. Everything about him was quite nice; his voice, his laugh, his looks. He was clean-cut and lean.

"I should eat what I wanted and send the rest away."

"It sounds easy, but it isn't really," Amaza assured him, and suddenly stopping at a certain house: "I must go in now."

"Do you live here?"

He considered the space and dignity of the dwelling.

"Yes. Do you live in the Square too? I haven't seen you about. And I have lived here all my life. I was born here, so was my father."

"Indeed! Is he inside now?"

"No," her voice softly vibrated (yet it was lost upon this man, who had never even gazed upon the soul of any woman since he was an infant and his mother held him), "he is dead. Do you live in the Square?"

"I—oh no. I live all over the place."

"Then why are you on Christmas night walking here alone, as I was?"

She ascended one of the wide steps, holding her frail black cloud of a skirt in one hand, the other hand lightly touching the wrought-iron railing. She distilled an air of childish lolling. She was mysterious, maddening. Above the area railing of the house next door, a maid was watching curiously and listening as hard as she could: she heard very little; gently-bred people have

the exasperating trick of talking softly. Amaza did not see her; she had a way of looking over areas and the things which areas imply. Sir Walter did see. Long experience in intrigues more or less delicate had made him acute. His brain could drop to areas, rise to garrets, and at the shortest notice.

"Well," he admitted, "Christmas Day is rather a boring affair. The club was empty and——"

"What club? My father's was the Column. He was a partner in Mummery's bank."

"Indeed!" He started, for, as it happened, he banked with Mummery, and the coincident was always common, yet it stirred you. "My club," he added, "is the Tamarind Tree in St. James's Square."

"What a lovely name! Is it a nice one?"

"Oh, they do you pretty well."

He sounded languid, a touch impatient; chance pretty girls and clubs you kept in different places.

Pretty girls! He stared. You couldn't call this a pretty girl. She was a regular beauty. She swept you off your feet. He felt—almost—as he had felt five-and-twenty years ago. Something that was rather pure, some past aroma of romance, brushed at him.

"Why did you leave it on Christmas night, to walk in a wet Square?"

Amaza went up another step as she spoke. She turned her head lightly on her shoulder. What an arrogant piquing gesture! He also came up a step. The cap above the area railings next door bobbed about in excitement. Down below, in Amaza's own kitchen, the particular Turvey of the moment was singing a song of his own country.

"Because I was lonely. The club was empty, as I said. Not a soul in the card-room. The very waiters yawning their heads off. So I strolled out."

"Providence sent you to me," said Amaza quite seriously.

"Providence!" He laughed; he was looking rapidly more astonished; his eyes—clear good eyes—bolted in his head.

"I knew a lady who lived in Russell Square once,"

he explained, feeling that something lame in this way might prove useful. "I thought I'd look her up; but it's years ago and no doubt she has gone. I knew her in the country; her husband's place was near ours."

"Would you call her county?" asked Amaza, bending down.

"County! Well, yes, I suppose one would. Oh, county, of course," he said; (—But what a queer way of putting it——)

"Her name was Gooch, perhaps?"

"Yes, her name was Gooch;" hesitating, speaking with a twinkle, he assured her of this.

Amaza came down the steps and close up to him; he felt that she danced.

"Then it was Sebastien's aunt," she said joyfully; "I've known her all my life. Rather a sour person. You don't mind my saying so?"

"Not a bit. Uncommonly sour."

"She has gone away, gone to live in Dorsetshire."

"She lived in Dorsetshire before."

"She has presented Sebastien with a living."

"I know the living," he nodded. "Tumble-down church; only ninety people in the parish; at least it was in my time."

On these occasions he was fluent and deft.

"Your time would be some way back." Amaza's candid eyes looked at him line by line, and he flinched. "I shall regard you as Sebastien's uncle."

"Please don't. I hate the very idea of an uncle."

"Do you?" She laughed—she was looking so happy and adorable; so changed from the forlorn, doubled-up girl he had found staring into puddles. "Well, it's true that there are no nice uncles. The only one I can remember is the *Babes in the Wood* one."

"Distinctly a bloodthirsty party," said Sir Walter, who had wit enough to meet this mood.

"You ought to be a Fairy Prince," Amaza told him, "for I was Cinderella when you found me. But you are rather old for that."

"I'm not so remarkably old," he said, looking nettled. His age was his sensitive point. And it was his pride

to reflect that he didn't look more than thirty-five. To be exact, there were times when he looked barely that; and other times when he appeared as a centenarian in well-chosen vices.

"Aren't you afraid of catching cold?" he asked abruptly, and looking at her neck.

The cloak was loose. He saw a square modestly filled in with lace that he knew to be costly. The women of his own rank wore it. He had not, of late years, mixed much with his family and his early friends, yet he kept his nice sense with women. He could place them exactly in the social scale. Amaza's white throat, the black fine mesh of the lace crossing it, stirred him. He was warmed by fires that were oddly pure. He dropped the ugly burden of his later years. She made him feel a boy again; a country bumpkin and innocent. As a youth he had loved, briefly, impossibly, ideally—as youths do. And the goddess now was doubtless grandmother to a row of budding rustics.

"It is a little chilly." She ascended the steps again; three steps, and now she was near the door. "I'm afraid I cannot ask you in to-night. I'd love to; it is Christmas and you are Sebastien's uncle, and——"

"Never mind Sylvestor and his uncle!" How much was she believing?

"And the servants go to bed at ten, when we are alone. In my father's time we used to have family prayers at ten, but my stepmother says that they make no difference in the world to the servants and are a great nuisance to the family. You are always in the middle of doing something when the bell rings."

"I see! You've got a stepmother. That is why you are Cinderella."

"That's it. I have two step-sisters too. And I hate them all and they hate me. Everything is in decent order. They have gone to spend Christmas with an old friend, Lady Leith, down in Surrey somewhere."

"And left you all alone! What a beastly shame!"

"Yes, isn't it? And how nice of you to feel that and to say so in a really vigorous way. I appreciate it and I must say good-night." She held out her hand.

"Turvey, that is our butler, has left off singing. He will be up to bolt the door in a minute. Good-bye. What did you say your name was?"

"It is Walter—Sir Walter Wintle. I didn't say so before."

"I shall always remember. I shall always be grateful, for I was dying to speak to some one."

"But, look here,"—he got her hand and held it—"this isn't to be everything, is it? You'll let me see you again. Can't we go to a—a concert or something?"

"That would be very nice. We might go and hear Alice Griffin. Have you heard of her?"

"Can't say I have!"

"She is a rising young violinist. Her portrait is carried about on boards down Regent Street. I knew her when we were small. Her father went to the Conventicle and so did mine."

"Indeed!"

He was looking bored. He very soon got bored and got cross. He got brutal, as self-indulgent people do. He was getting old and tired with trotting; he was like a country donkey—it required all sorts of artifices to make him go.

"Won't you let me take you out to dinner?" he asked, sounding restive.

"To the Tamarind Tree?"

"The club? Oh no, we don't entertain ladies."

"Not even unawares?" She laughed, her head was held on one side.

"Unawares!" He looked all at sea. "But, listen, there are other places, restaurants, you know."

"I've heard of them. I've never been in one."

"Never been in one!" He gulped before he spoke. He stared at her.

"I've never been in lots of places. Turvey has started singing again. Those German love-songs have lots of verses. I am so glad."

Sir Walter was still holding her hand. Suddenly aware, she, in lovely perturbation, moved her fingers.

"Don't try to run away," he besought. "Remember I am Sebastien's uncle."

"You said you wouldn't be his uncle just now."

"I wasn't holding your hand then. I will be his grandfather if you will let me take you out to dinner. And you must"—he looked suspicious—"have been in a restaurant. Come now."

"Really—not." The red head shook. "I've been to my stepmother's club to tea. It is the big one in Piccadilly. That is all. We were, in my father's time, a very strict household, and I like to go on as he left me. I've never even been to a theatre. I can't dance."

"You amaze me," he said. "And, by the way, what is your name? I've told you mine."

"You've said my name, short of a vowel. It is Amaza—Amaza Meeks. I can't let you take me out to dinner. My stepmother would be sure to think it improper. But I can entertain you myself. Will you come here and dine to-morrow night? I shall be quite alone."

"That would be delightful," said Sir Walter, gravely and after a considerable pause for prudence.

They settled the hour. Turvey left off singing suddenly and, as suddenly, they parted.

Amaza went up-stairs in a dream. Sir Walter, walking out of the dark Square and westward, told himself that he meant the child no harm. She was charming.

And, after all, one need not go. Very often you didn't.

Yet when one says "one need not go"—one does!

He knew that well enough; he had gone so often. Boxing night saw him alight at the house in Russell Square.

Amaza had spent a delirious day of preparation. At last she mattered to some one—she alone! Only once had she even remembered Sebastien. To fly to him, because he loved her; this impulse, so natural yesterday, became the madness of to-day. She was a woman, just unfolding. Dimly, she came to some knowledge of herself. She realized that these swift impulses, inevitable to-day, absurdity to-morrow—since you had not followed them: these moods were going to sway her whole life and lead her hither, thither. To skate on a thin crust of ice, above the dangerous river—it was to be this!

She dramatically interviewed the cook; which was not necessary—yet she was very eager that her first dinner should be a big success. She consulted Turvey about wine. Her father, partly from tradition, partly because abstainers, of any sort, were contemptible, had kept an excellent cellar, meanwhile slaking his own thirst with barley water. Rich feeding affronted him. Her step-mother, who rioted in good living, made her demand upon the cellar. It was as large a demand as gentility would allow.

Turvey listened respectfully, he gave his advice when asked; staring sentimentally at the wall and never looking at you. This was his way. He also was chronically sad—in some subtle, speechless fashion: as Alice Griffin, as oneself. It was a shock to find a person of the lower class with feelings.

At seven o'clock everything was ready. Amaza had put on her most beautiful black frock. She had threaded through her hair a ribbon.

She waited in the drawing-room; feeling excited, piqued, yet still defrauded: this sense never quite left her. Was it always some one—or something—yet wanting!

Sir Walter admired her immensely when he was shown in. He was charmed. He had not been so keen for years. Just to walk in a wet, respectable Square on Christmas night; doing nothing, meaning nothing, bored to death, feeling vaguely that you had made a hash of your life—what dramatic comedy it brought you!

They went down to dinner.

"I half thought," said Amaza, "of asking Alice Griffin to come and bring her fiddle. You would have liked that."

"I should have hated it." He frowned, for she had hurt his vanity; which was the one vulnerable part remaining. "What can three people do?"

"Two people can do more." Amaza nodded. "I didn't think of that, and I nearly rung her up. She is always at home in the mornings practising."

"Is she a great friend? Do you see her often?"

"Oh no, hardly ever. I saw her after the concert the

other day. She gave one at Queen's Hall. When we were small I used to look at her in the Conventicle. She always seemed nice, and so unhappy."

"It can't be nice to be unhappy."

He sipped the sherry. What sherry!

"It is nicer than being always cheerful. People like that make me blink. They are the sun, when you don't want it. I pull down the blinds of my soul."

If any one understood this it was Turvey. For he had a mournful mien, and when he wasn't faintly flirting below-stairs with the English maidens amongst whom he found himself for the moment, he was dreaming of another maiden, more rare, who waited for him in South Germany. When he had learned the language he would go back to her.

"I don't think," said Sir Walter, "that you can have too much sun in a climate like this."

It was a silly remark—but then he looked so nice while he made it! He looked humble and obtuse and kind; as Sebastien sometimes looked.

He was enjoying himself. The piquant sauce of the *affaire* itself was solidified by good wines and excellent cooking. He liked the table, which was heavy with beautiful silver and glass. There was an air of opulent family tradition. He liked the room, with its dignified mahogany furniture and good pictures. The one picture he did not like was that of the red-haired woman above the hearth. Her eyes were watchful and the eyes of a mother. Clearly a mother's eyes; she and Amaza were replicas. She made him most uncomfortable. Except for this one canvas he might have been sitting at a dinner-table in his own county—yes, and twenty years back! A table where the eating was solemn and expensive, where the talk was mainly on parochial topics and of foreign places where you went to take waters for the gout. He was of a very good family indeed—yet a side branch; and, as a man, he was faintly discredited and quite impoverished. Sometimes they spoke of him, his own people, in his own county, and said that it was a great pity "Wally hadn't settled down and married decently." Then they forgot, although once they had

been fond of him. He was quite a despicable person, outside and in; yet you did get fond of him. There was the danger. Amaza was fond already; and why, she did not know.

They had a delightful evening. The whole house was happy. Amaza had given the women-servants something to talk about; moreover, when she had "dished up dinner for her family," the cook from next door came in and talked too. They were nearly as mystified by Sir Walter as Sir Walter was by Amaza. Turvey was also happy; since he considered that the visit of the handsome Englishman meant decidedly a *douceur:* this, to improve his English, he mentally called "a teep." He thought in English, when he could remember to. He was anxious to learn and so get back to the girl in South Germany. Every "teep" helped him back to her: and she was his Heaven.

Up-stairs, after dinner, Sir Walter enthralled Amaza. She was so unsophisticated. Again and again, she gave him shocks by her lovely ignorance on all things. Assumed or real? He did not know. He only knew that the shocks were galvanic, and that, as the night wore on, he grew younger and more daring.

He was a travelled man of the world. Amaza had merely been taken, under her stepmother's wing, and therefore in a state of smother and complete suppression, to those places where every one goes. This is not travel: it is only sea-sickness.

He had conversation, of a shallow sort. He had, beyond all, experience, and he was most skilled—of the devil! He did not mean Amaza any harm. He did not look beyond to-night; beyond, perhaps, to-morrow night or the night after: for he would prevail on her to ask him again. She was delicious. Yet, since he had bent his brain, from his youth up, to the winning of women, his manner was to some purpose, despite him. He was winning Amaza more than he knew. For he had that invaluable gift of conveying worship by his every word and glance and gesture, by his very attitude; and more—of making the idol of the moment believe that he bent the knee for the first time.

Call it a drug, this masculine manner—and admit that few women can drink it without some degrees of intoxication! Now Amaza had all her days been thirsty!

At ten o'clock she arose, with the manner of a queen ending an audience.

Her purity and singleness of purpose brought him to his feet. He had almost forgotten what manner and quality of little girl it was in whose house he sat to-night. He had barely been thinking of her; he had only looked at her. He had been laving himself in the waves of his own life: not clean waves, but strewn with ignoble wreckage of the little sort. Not high waves—very: he never had the grandeur to rise to a storm.

"Good-night," said Amaza, looking dazzling. "I've been so happy. You have entertained me."

Her manner was so sweetly distant, so transcendently away, that he might have been a popular conjurer who had entertained her guests and was to take supper in the housekeeper's room. He wasn't used to this manner of dismissal.

"But how about next time?" he asked, and held her hand and looked into those dark eyes which always held several things and to which he had not yet found the key. She piqued him. He would find it, however. He would unlock every room. He would riot through the household. He broke into houses—which are hearts: he took what he wanted, then went away.

"Why won't you let me take you somewhere? A concert, a theatre—you said you didn't go to theatres—or a restaurant."

"I said I didn't go to restaurants."

"So you did—say so."

His manner was doubtful. It was a great deal to believe.

"I don't think I ought to go out with you anywhere. But you can come here as often as you like."

"As—often—as—I like."

He felt that he jumped a hurdle between every word.

"I mean, come to dinner again." Amaza snatched away her hand. It seemed brusque, most impolite. She

was sorry afterwards. But it had been an impulse; one of those acts you don't pause to reflect upon.

"When my stepmother comes home, I——"

"We won't talk about her yet," he laughed, "nor will we talk of Valentine."

"Valentine?"

"Wasn't that his name?"

"Perhaps you mean Sebastien." Amaza seemed perplexed. "But, Sir Walter, you must have known him when he was a little boy. His father and mother were drowned coming home from India. He lived with his aunt in Dorsetshire until his uncle died, and then she settled in London."

"I've got a very bad memory for little boys."

"Still, you must have met him."

"Yes, I certainly must have met him," he agreed. "May I come to-morrow? Is it too soon?"

"Nothing could be too soon," Amaza told him warmly. "You have consoled me so. You have opened the world to me. I was feeling so lonely and so shut out of things when you saw me in the Square. And you were manna in the wilderness."

On this, he came for several nights. Seven o'clock saw him in Russell Square to the moment. Seven o'clock found Amaza sitting in some cunning black drapery or the other awaiting him. Half-past seven saw the South German Turvey moving about the dignified dining-room with his pensive manner of handing things. Eight o'clock saw the cook next door slip out from her own area and down into Amaza's cook's area.

It was becoming a habit of life; to dream of Sir Walter through the day, to hang upon his words by night. He and Amaza grew to know each other very well, in this phase of novelty which lasted nearly a week. At least, they thought they knew each other. In noble truth, they must remain for ever utter strangers. He won her by his subtle flatteries, by his knightly air of homage: and, always, he was winning more than he knew. He might have been startled had he known; since he never took any extreme step. He was always content to drift: and if the woman swept past him towards the rapids, well,

then, she was a fool to venture into such waters; that was all.

A clear flame burned within Amaza; yet only of gratitude. He had made her feel that she supremely mattered; he had given her confidence and self-respect—also the knowledge and the daring of her charm. This was a debt you could never repay. Sebastien had done it, in his noisy youthful way. Yet he had perverted his passion into an acrid attack upon Vicars' wives. He had thereupon fluttered away to sit upon some lonely peak of Idealism. Idealism is all very well, yet the woman demands that it shall centre round her and draw its rays from her.

Moreover, surveying Sebastien (who already seemed to be a long way off) you could not be impressed by a person you had known all your life, for he held no mystery. Sir Walter was dark with mystery—and dreadful! She had seen him, when his face was off guard, look very old, and something more haunting than old. She was not in love with him, that would be absurd. But she was immensely fascinated by him, and already he could do as he chose with her.

She would sit in the big drawing-room, with her head on one side, with her chin in the twin cups of her hands, looking at him and listening to his really skilful talk. She watched his fine clear profile, his mouth, which one might call pretty, and which, already, sometimes struck her as repellent. She would mark the drenched fires in his eyes. They stared out at her through an infinitude of years. Once or twice—and such glances shook her (she was then a tree in a warm wild storm)—he flung her a lover glance; yes, and the glance of a young lover. This was in infrequent moments when his mood was in its teens.

It was a wonderful week; it was barely a week, as the clock goes. It was one of those times which temper a life; times when the door behind you locks with a spring, when the new vista opens out and terrifies you, or enchants you—or both!

Amaza through those distracting days walked in a web. It spun across her eyes, it tangled her feet. She

beat it from her with both hands. She caught the ends as they flew and wound them about her brain and heart. It was a time to tremble over; to be penitent with, reminiscent with, in terror of, yes, and for ever. Not for what it was; just a vicious and well-bred man of the world, just a very young and totally ignorant girl; but for what it was going to be; for the note it would strike.

Through the days, she stunned herself with novels, revived herself with vague walks; she never drew one deep breath until the evening, when he came. Her hands trembled as she dressed for dinner, as she twisted up her hair, as she saw her pale face in the glass. It was all wonderful, wonderful. It could not be that her stepmother and the Langfields were coming back soon; that they were writing to her every day. There came a morning when she burned a letter from Violet unopened. The morning after, she picked up one from her stepmother, trembled, then pitched that upon the red coals too. She was filled with a queer loathing for her stepmother; it was stronger than it had ever been.

Sir Walter, summoning such insight as he had, found a joy, rather more subtle than he had been accustomed to, in watching her face, her changes of colour, the timid marvel of her manner. He thought he understood her. She was destined to suffer all through by the gross interpretations of other people. From persons of the Mrs. Huckson sort (upwards or downwards), nobody took a true reading. There would be several people to make the essay yet; before she had done with the world and flung it from her as a tattered and an ill-fitting garment.

The girl had expression now and fire. When he found her in the Square doubled up over a puddle, she had looked more than stupid; she had looked an idiot. He concluded that she was one; this was before she stared at him and spoke. Yet even now, after the magic of these evenings together, he would have declared her non-intelligent. And sometimes she irritated him horribly, for he liked a bright girl; some one with the usual pert repartee. He concluded that there was something lacking; when now, for the first time, he stumbled across the something more.

One night he looked at her beauty too long for prudence. He forgot that she was not the usual toy that you bought for a trifle, then broke in your hand. He forgot that here was a woman of his own rank. He forgot that he never meant to marry. The time for marriage was past—or not yet come.

In early youth he might have married the goddess who was now a grandmother of rustics. In plain prose, she had been the usual gamekeeper's nut-brown daughter—the sort of female you read about in books, and who is sometimes the young housemaid found in country houses. The astuteness and skill of a fatherly relative had saved him from this slip. As for the future, when he got old he might marry his cook; for he was getting tired of clubs and chambers and spasmodic travel. Already he had considered the idea of a tiny house near the Park, if one might be found and if he could run to it. Well, then, with a house, with battered health, with an adroit cook, he might come to marrying her: men did. However! That time was a long way off—and the nearer he got to fifty the farther away got the time.

He was not now, in his prime, meaning to marry a banker's bit of a girl; beautiful if you like, uncommonly so: yet almost half-witted and probably without a penny.

Therefore he was a fool to start up suddenly, to touch that glorious hair upon her brow and kiss her very lightly between the eyes. He retained just sense enough to look round to the door first and be sure that the German butler wasn't there. This was inevitable; this was his age. At forty—past—you may have the sentiments of youth, but you retain elements of caution even in your most reckless moments.

Amaza tumbled up from the chair. Her manner was bruised. What was that look upon her face? He had never seen anything quite like it: and he had broken into lots of houses. For this first kiss was a fresh burglary.

"Oh," she said, "you shouldn't, you shouldn't—but——"

Her head fell far back—and wasn't it a throat! Her

hands dropped limply down. She certainly looked distraught. What had he done? She was quite unlike all other girls, she was a tiny bit wrong somewhere. What was she doing in this big house all alone? Was the whole thing a fairy tale? Had he stepped into a trap?

Her hands dropped, then jerked up. She rubbed her face between the eyes; rubbed the place that he had kissed.

"I'm sorry," said Sir Walter.

He felt anxious and ashamed. He felt on slippery ground.

Amaza looked at him blankly.

"I wonder," she said, "if I want you to be sorry."

Now there was a thing to say! And after starting up like a lunatic! He bit his under-lip and moved his teeth along it. He did not look nice, but Amaza wasn't watching. Her head was down now; that lovely full line of throat obscured. She was probably crying, and if she was—he stared at her hair and rose to the heights of imagination—her very tears were red. For this girl was a furnace.

She was also a witch; since she imposed the strangeness of her mood on him.

"You are wonderful," he stuttered—she had broken him upon a wheel. "You send me off my head and I feel a boy again. You remind me, not of any other woman, upon my soul, but of a time. I am madly in love with you, Amaza."

The last few words (all save the very last one) had been in the stilted manner, and he had said them so often that now they made even him feel sick. Yet he was really more moved than he thought he ever could be. The pointed face, pale and most pathetically wild, did terrific things with him. He was savage with himself and furious with Amaza.

The usual stillness and composure came now to her rescue, enveloping her once more. To do her justice, reflected Sir Walter, and, for his part, rapidly cooling, she was the least hysterical creature he had met—in like circumstance! Beyond everything else, he dreaded scenes and tantrums. Circumstance had flung him into

the stream of many. He had spluttered and struggled and scrambled to the shore again; with his mouth full of mud.

"Will you go away?" she asked quietly. "And will you please come to-morrow night as usual; be sure to come."

He triumphed in her first look of appeal; the look he knew so well. So far—he had won!

"I will go," he assented, moving slowly from her side. "I will come to-morrow."

He was gone.

Amaza listened to the faint pause in the hall while Turvey helped him into his overcoat.

The street door thudded.

She sat staring at her hands. Sebastien's funny, cheap ring no longer circled the particular finger.

CHAPTER IV

THE BORROWED THING

Amaza was dreaming over the fragilities of her late breakfast next day. The food was quite ephemeral; just tea, cream, fruit, round rolls of bread with a glazed surface, attendant balls of butter. She hardly saw any of it. She nibbled and sipped quite mechanically.

It was queer, she reflected upon that for a moment, before passing on to purer thoughts, that the post, for the first time, brought no news of her stepmother or the Langfields. Well! But that saved one the bother of burning.

She was dazed, enraptured, and rendered quite unreal by the brief experience of the evening before. Sir Walter had lightly kissed her brow—just as you would stroke a cat. He had aroused an immortal being.

He had swept an instrument and it still vibrated. She felt, however, as she had felt when Sebastien, even more timidly, had touched the strings—that the instrument was not his own. These two had played with varying skill upon a borrowed thing. The man to whom music rightly belonged—where and who was he? Moreover—was he at all?

She remained aimless at the table; for there was no use in living until the clock struck seven to-night. Rhythmically she stroked the kitchen cat; a lean black beast who had wandered up-stairs and who surveyed her with those round green eyes of a cat which may mean—well, goodness knows what! The pupils were mere pin-points and looked malignant. The animal was in its mood of morning languor. Amaza kept on stroking; she loved to fondle, and here was a cat—at least a thing that was alive and most responsive. Her

face was ineffably tender; she loved even this thing to be happy, since she gave the happiness.

To-night at seven! To-night at seven! She continually said these empty words to herself, and she wondered how she would meet, not Sir Walter, but the mood and the memory which his presence for the future must always invoke. When he rang the bell, would she run away, would the primitive and the hoyden prevail? She considered not. Whatever her inward tumult and delightful shrinking, she would retain stillness. She did not yet know—we never know until the minute-hand points upon our Future—that Sir Walter would not enter this house again: not yet—not for many years. Not for ever? Even the Future was misty about that. The happening, if happen were to be, that was a long time off!

Thinking in this way, stroking the delighted cat, whose purr filled the room, like the voice of a living kettle on the warm hob; probing half childishly, half mystically into her feelings, filled with the acutest and most tender interest in her own soul as always, Amaza was suddenly startled out of her senses and swept to her feet by the banging open of the door. Her stepmother bounced in. At the same moment the kitchen cat tore past her in terror and down the kitchen stairs. Who shall say that cats are not supremely subtle!

Just as the neck feathers of a hen ruffle and—to make the comparison more distant and even more absurd—as the tail of a cat swells and stiffens, so the stepmother's silk skirts and thick furs ruffled and grew large.

She banged the door behind her. The thing that she saw and noticed most was the red-headed woman above the hearth. That portrait filled the room, as it always did. The red-headed girl stood just beneath. How one had hated the two, living and dead, from the very first. And, here at last, was the moment for riddance. This was her dominant feeling, yet she did not know it.

"Amaza," she said in an awful voice and without preliminary, "I hear that you've had gentlemen dining in the house nearly every night. What does it mean?"

"Only one gentleman." Amaza sat down, then got

up and timidly advanced. "He was coming again to-night. Shall I send him a wire? Have you come to stay? Shall I undo that stole? It seems to trouble you."

The stepmother was fumbling at her sable, and the effort certainly choked her, for her face was dark purple.

"Don't come near me," she shouted, and started dramatically back. This was a dramatic occasion. Unlike Sir Walter, she loved a scene. She was underbred. No one knew the beginnings even of the late Langfield. Behind him, his widow's past was wrapped in utter darkness. By her violence to her servants and her constant petty tyrannies, the servants themselves declared that she had been one herself. This was improbable; untutored minds always come down upon a theory with a sledge-hammer.

"What does it mean?" she repeated. "I insist upon having the names of these men."

How horrible all this sounded!

"I told you there was only one man,"—Amaza appeared affronted, yet utterly bored—"and I never tell lies. He is Sir Walter Wintle. I met him in the Square on Christmas night. I went out late, for I was very lonely. He came up and spoke to me. He has been a true friend."

Her tongue limped along at the last; since, always, she was truthful! And that kiss last night was not the act of a friend—although it might imply an even higher relationship. She pushed her red hair back from her face. The stepmother was staring—and again staring. This was enough to astonish any woman. Her knees were very wide apart. Her hands, grown podgy and mottled with the passing of years, gripped round them. She was genuinely shocked. This was natural. It was commendable from her point of view.

"Wintle, Wintle, Wintle," she said, and at every repetition turned more plum-coloured, "I know the name. Why—that is the man who was mixed up years ago in some newspaper case; card-sharping or something worse."

"It must have been something worse. He doesn't

care much for cards. He only plays for ridiculous stakes. That came out in conversation." Amaza, speaking, displayed a gentle manner of wishing to help.

"Are you mad?" stormed Mrs. Meeks. "Or are you merely half witted? Can't you realize the disgraceful thing you've done? And you took him all over the house. I know that for a fact."

"You seem to know a great deal, yet that isn't a fact. I took him up to show him my nursery. That was the night before last. I had been telling him about the time when I was a little girl and when I was lonely, and before you came and——"

"What would any man care for all that? You take such a silly interest in yourself."

"Of course. I don't know any one else nearly so well, nor can ever expect to. I told him that I had been a good friend to myself, and he said he'd been his own worst enemy. I felt so sorry for him."

"Never mind all this rubbish," Mrs. Meeks fumed afresh, and can any decent matron marvel! "Of course you know that you've brought disgrace upon the house; yes, and upon the memory of your poor dear father."

She at once drew down her mouth. It was an expression she adopted when referring to her husbands; she drew it down a little deeper for Langfield than for Meeks.

"We won't talk about my father. He has gone now."

"I'm glad you've got that sense of decency. And your mother too—what would any mother feel on such a matter? I'm thankful you are no child of mine, Amaza."

"So am I. We always have been," agreed Amaza.

Mrs. Meeks did not respond to this; either she did not hear, or she had not an answer of sufficient weight ready. She was looking at the portrait, a look that shook a fist at it. Her pose, with extended emotion, became comically vulgar.

"I wouldn't say a word against the dead," she declared impressively at last, "but she couldn't have been a proper woman or you wouldn't have turned out such a shameless daughter. I'm very sorry to say such a thing. It wounds me."

"Are you talking about my mother?"

"Of course I am," snapped Mrs. Meeks, and staring at the quivering face of her stepdaughter.

The girl looked quite drivelling.

"Well, then, do you mind talking about your own daughters. Leave me and my real mother alone. We can manage."

"Manage, manage—what do you mean? You have always been weak-minded, Amaza. I ought not to have left you."

"It has taken you nearly two weeks to find that out. Yet you are usually so sharp. Now you have come back, and I suppose Rose and Violet are behind the door," said Amaza wearily.

For she did not know how she was possibly going to support those three and the squalid life they led.

"My girls! Do you suppose I would bring them back here until I had got to the bottom of everything? You have never been a fit companion for them, and that is why I sent you to school at the start. It was a strict school, but they did you no good."

"You had to be very good before you could stand it," shuddered Amaza—with many memories!

"When you didn't answer their letters, and when I wrote to you yesterday and told you unless I had a wire to say all was well, I would return——" puffed the stepmother.

"Did you? I haven't been reading letters lately. I just burned them, I didn't want them, you know. I was quite happy."

"And when Mrs. Burton's cook——"

Mrs. Burton was the tenant next door.

"Mrs. Burton's cook!" interrupted Amaza. "I thought, do you know, it must have been Turvey who told you, and yet he seems too nice. But servants always betray you. My father warned me of that. Nurse was a traitor years ago and——"

"I shall have a word to say to that woman Huckson," cried Mrs. Meeks. "She gave me her word of honour she would come and look after you."

"Their word of honour is worth nothing. Haven't

you learned that at registry offices? I should have thought that Mrs. Mount——"

"How on earth can you sit grinning there and talking about Mrs. Mount? You have no feeling; idiots haven't." The stepmother fanned herself with the ends of her stole. "I never knew any one more dull and more depraved."

Surveying Amaza, she was thinking, "I will certainly take her to a mental man in Harley Street. For she must have a screw loose somewhere."

This indeed was the only reasonable view which any practical woman of the world could take.

"When Sir Walter comes to-night——" began Amaza, with a faint shiver at the prospect of the triple interview, yet not flinching from it.

"I tell you this,"—her stepmother rose—"if that man comes to this house I will have him arrested. You may go to your room, Amaza, and stay there until I say you may leave it. Thank goodness you are under age and I can do as I like with you until May. And I shall certainly not let my pure girls come near you until——"

She started to sniffle and choke; for she was the common and hysterical sort—and, so far, Amaza had cheated her of all response. This is the one thing hysteria cannot support. Mrs. Meeks wanted to literally fly at Amaza and for Amaza to fly at her. She yearned for the flutter of feathers and scattering of fur, for the sharp unsheathing of claws.

Instead of which Amaza serenely allowed herself to be called an idiot, to be called depraved and dull without showing any visible resentment.

"After all I've done and all I've endured; the martyr I've been to duty, the sacrifices I've——"

"Keep composed. The parlourmaid is outside the door. I can smell her," said Amaza softly. "We passed her, Sir Walter and I, on our way from the nursery the night before last, and her frangipanni made me sick. I wouldn't have noticed her else. They call it frangipanni, and hers is cheap. Why do you allow her to use it? It is not the natural smell of these people that one minds; it is their scent and——"

Mrs. Meeks wiped her eyes. They were bolting out of her head—and can one wonder! A girl who would stand there talking of stale frangipanni!

"I shall not give way," she remarked, fully alive to the futility of it. "Go to your room, Amaza, and——"

"No, dear, I shall not go to my room, but I will stay in the house until after lunch if you wish. Then I shall go for a walk to think things over."

"I shall not allow you to meet Violet and Rose, remember, until——"

"Why should I want to meet Violet and Rose? Have you left them at Lady Leith's?"

"Yes, in a respectable house, I am thankful to say, and——"

"Why, isn't yours a respectable house?"

"Amaza! I won't stay in the same room; I choke in the same air. Your manner is shameless. You are what is called a degenerate. I believe you were born bad. That is about the secret of it. I will see the servants. I will give every one of them notice. I will go straight off to Mrs. Mount for an entirely new staff."

She hurled herself out of the room. Amaza remained standing, stunned, faintly smiling. She looked up at her real mother. There was cynical soft mockery in the large eyes. Perhaps the dead felt no pity and gave no guidance. This seemed very hard.

Bells rang, feet hurried, voices rose. An earthquake shook the house. At last a voice said, isolated (it was the scented parlourmaid's)—

"She's gone off to old Mother Mount's, and good luck to her."

The hours passed. Were they mere minutes or untotalled ages?

At one, Turvey came in to set out lunch. He wore a polite simper. He seemed sorry and excited. For the past hour he had been trolling his incorrigible love songs down below. Amaza, looking at his loaded tray, stole out of the room and up the stairs. When she left, thought the romantic Turvey, who loved her hair, she stole a sunbeam.

Her mind was made up. She shut herself in her own

room and methodically packed her boxes. She stowed in them things which were dear; cheap gimcracks of her childhood. She counted her money and found she had, all told, nearly fifteen pounds. Also she had her mother's jewels; distracted heroines always sold their jewels. She had the trunks strapped and carried downstairs. Turvey was dispatched to the door for a cab. She would always see him and hear him as he stood whistling upon the step. One was fond of this Turvey; he seemed made of kin stuff. At the last, she gave him a whole sovereign. That would help him back to the girl in South Germany. He sentimentally watched her drive away.

The servants were crowded at the head of the kitchen stairs and bobbing at the kitchen windows. Not one of them tried to stop her, although this was evidently a solemn exit. Moreover, they knew, for Turvey had seen it lying in the morning-room, that she had written a farewell note to her stepmother. When the cab was out of sight, the scented parlourmaid meant to steam that note.

Amaza, turning out of the Square and rattling down Southampton Row, was drearily conscious that no one had tried to stop her. Had Nurse been present, to kiss her and pound her on the back and say, "Law now, Miss Amaza. There! There!" she would never have gone. She was a home-loving creature and the house was eloquent. In a very few hours she would have been comforted; would have resolved into her usual mood of soft, vague sorrow. When she had gone off the time before and to Sebastien, not a soul had stopped her. Always, there stretched before one the untrammelled way and it was desolate.

She had told the cabman to drive to Victoria. When they got there she had her luggage put into the cloakroom. Re-entering the cab, she instructed him to proceed to St. James's Square and the Tamarind Tree.

"'*Life is the House and Man the Fruit of his own Choosing*,'" she quoted, laughing, the tears upon her cheeks. "I will be a Tamarind."

She alighted at the club and dismissed the cab.

Double doors swung open. She perceived a page boy near at hand; an older flunkey sat peering from a large glass box, which was the inquiry office. He had yellow lace upon his claret-coloured coat: this looked fruity—as it should. He had a curious expression upon his face.

"I wish to see Sir Walter Wintle," she said distinctly. "Tell him it is Miss Meeks, Miss Amaza Meeks."

She felt a backwash of memory when she said this: for she had said exactly the same to Huckson, and that was years ago.

They conducted her to a leather lounge; one of those things into which you sink, wherein you wallow and which makes you feel that your legs are too short. Amaza, who was tall, considered that hers were sticking into her chin.

It was a splendid house and had once been a ducal residence. She wished that Sir Walter would come quickly, then they could get out into the open air and walk about. It was, according to Amaza, a charming day; brown and dim, caressing.

Various men passed up and down the stairs, backward and forward from other rooms. They languidly stared; so did the page, who had been up-stairs and whisked down again; so did the observant flunkey in the big glass box.

It seemed a long while before she saw Sir Walter come winding his astonished way down those stairs, with their richly-twisted rails and their background of huge canvases. She stood up, then sat down again. She looked almost gawky. The luxury and dead splendour of this place exhausted her spirit. She flickered.

He approached, his face frightened her. It was just the same this time as it had been the time before. Impulse wore a robe of indelicacy. He looked very much as Sebastien had looked that Sunday.

"I told you," he said curtly, yet taking her hand and already roused by her radiant young presence, "that we didn't entertain ladies. Fortunately this is Friday, when we do. Otherwise, it might have been awkward."

"I didn't stop to think." Amaza's dark eyes sought for pity and found none. "Something has happened. I came straight off to tell you."

He made an impatient gesture. The usual thing had happened, no doubt. She had not been cautious or clever enough, they seldom were. She had got him into a hobble, confound her.

"You'd better come in and have some tea and tell me all about it," he said, controlling himself and even smiling—though in a fixed and ghastly way.

He guided her into another room. It was even hotter than the entry place in which she had awaited him; for there, at least, you could see, through discreet double doors of glass, the beautiful trees in the Square. Here you saw nothing but a blaze of red leather and a stript forest of bald heads.

Various gentlemen were disposed about the place. They were buried alive in red leather chairs, or sprawling on red leather benches beneath the windows. It was fat red leather and it was tight-laced, as Amaza paradoxically put it to herself, with buttons.

Evidently the Tamarind was an exotic fruit.

She looked at the men. Some were old and wooden-looking. Some were young, with naked faces and naked minds. Time had left, so far, no impression upon them of any sort, so that their faces appeared most improper. Some were middle-aged. One was frankly sleeping, with his hands comfortably upon his convenient stomach, with his mouth wide open. He revolted her.

They all, with this exception, looked up when she and Sir Walter came in. She was, as Mrs. Huckson put it, a "staring"-looking girl, and she was most elegantly dressed in black.

The men stared, but only for a moment; their very minds were asphyxiated. They would have dismissed angel or devil with a curt glance. Some of them had digested the morning papers and were now nibbling at early editions of the evening ones. Some were blankly staring at ballet girls, and others, pictured in the magazines. Some were actually looking at their watches, to see when it would be dinner-time: when they were not devouring paper in one room, they were devouring flesh in another.

There were one or two clergymen—and the gold

crosses dangling on their waistcoats seemed a profanation in such a torpid place. Sebastien had once said that the Cross was the symbol of fight. You couldn't fight anything firmer than a muffin here. The waiter brought a tea-tray and a plate of muffins. He put them down before her and Sir Walter. She thought of Sebastien in his little parish a long way off. Would it have been better to search out Sebastien? She shrugged. She was feeling quite broken-hearted. Every one failed you. It would have made no difference; Dorsetshire or the Tamarind Tree. Yet wasn't there Something or Some One?

Sir Walter said—

"Will you pour out?" He was closely watching her.

She obeyed. Her muscles felt as if pulled by wires. The general air of somnolence and gorging sent her wild, and she chose to regard the Tamarind Tree as a roadside Hell.

"Now then, tell me," he said, taking his cup and sipping. "What's up?"

"I can't talk here." She moved feverishly. "It is like a padded room. Haven't you got a corner which is cool?"

"Cool!" He stared. "Why, it's an infernally cold day. All the members have been complaining. This place is warmed with pipes, and they don't keep them nearly hot enough."

"Well," returned Amaza, suddenly standing, yet speaking with sweetest apology, "I can't stay here. It is burning me up."

"My dear child! What nonsense! Aren't you even going to drink your tea?"

She sat down and gulped it obediently—as a dose!

Sir Walter said, helplessly, with his utter lack of mystery and resource, "Where can we go? What can we do? It is more comfortable here than it will be anywhere else. And"—he pulled out his watch—"time rather presses. I have an appointment at five."

"I wonder"—Amaza pushed aside the cup and, smiling, stood again—"if you will keep it. Do please take me out of doors. It is making me ill; all this."

She held out her hands; with a movement she included the members.

Sir Walter was the sort of man who sulks when his club is attacked. He looked now as if Amaza had impugned his honour: this was a quality which he still considered he had.

"All right!" He arose and put his hands in his pockets. "Wait here, will you, while I get my hat and coat."

He looked at her intently before he left her. His eyes were bright. He turned round at the door to look at her again. His mood changed. How oddly lovely this girl was. And he believed that she was innocent—as insanely, idiotically innocent as her talk and her manner implied. What luck for him that such a creature should have flung herself across his path. You would never get tired of looking at her; as to her drivelling talk, you need not listen. For she was certainly not what you could call bright, now, was she?

He asked himself this as he went off to the place for his hat and coat, as he exchanged a nod or a word with men he met and knew. He decided that he would take precious good care she didn't come to the Tamarind Tree again. Your club was a thing you must keep apart. Moreover, she was plainly one of those ill-balanced girls who did queer things. He prided himself on his common sense.

Amaza, for her part, sat staring at the somnolent gentlemen and reflecting gravely.

"No. I don't like the taste of tamarinds."

Sir Walter came back. His manner was warmer. They hurried through the Square and bustled through various by-streets which she did not know.

They emerged into the Mall at last and went into St. James's Park.

Sir Walter put his collar up. He looked high-shouldered and old. Amaza was staring about her and happily snuffling. This January day was a day of great beauty, for those with scent and with vision. It was vague with the promise of spring. It was treacherous, as beguiling things so often are; spring would not be yet.

It was so baffling that it magically touched up faces and turrets and the fringes of paths: London was in that mood and wearing that manner which almost persuades poetic persons to leave the large quiet pastoral places and live here, close, in the beating bosom of things.

Sir Walter, of course, felt and knew nothing; save that he was cold and that he was in a deuced delicate position. He said to Amaza more than once, as they went along—

"Now then, what is it?"

She had returned—

"Not yet, not here. Wait until we come to the Park. The motor-'buses bother me and I can't talk."

They were in the Park now and practically alone. Nursemaids were taking children home; for the beautiful day was drooping and, one by one, great jewels of light flashed out in the world beyond the railing. Amaza, of course, thought of the Russell Square Gardens and the long ago time: it had been so desolate, when it was—and now it had become so dear.

"We will stop here for a bit," said Sir Walter. He touched her, drew her to an empty bench. He sat close. The Park grew dim and grew more empty. Richer and richer flashed those jewels of light in the streets beyond. Soothing was the hum of the huge city. Amaza was rested, reassured, consoled. She remembered, and for the first time since she had entered the Tamarind Tree, that only last night Sir Walter had kissed her and had said, in a strange voice, "I love you madly."

Well, then! The men who chose you to be their very own, they never said more. Did they? She did not love him, she loved no one living. Yet she was enthralled by the thought that he should love her and that he should give into her hands the power to sway him. This sense of things had been submerged in the Tamarind Tree. It rose glistening to the surface now.

A clock somewhere struck five. Sir Walter had already forgotten his appointment, upon the ingenuity of which he had prided himself when he told the lie. He did not wish to leave Amaza now. He could not leave her.

"Tell me," he said.

It was a tender voice.

She told him everything; spreading the fabric of the affair before his eyes, adding her own quaint, most pitiful embroideries.

"If she had been kind I might have stayed. But her manner shocked me, I can't say why. It was—what is the word?—corrupt. It was nothing she exactly said. It was the way she sat and the way she stared. She called me lots of names beginning with D and——"

"The—the—*dickens*," interpolated Sir Walter.

"No, it wasn't D for dickens; nor D for devil, nor—the other D. It was dull and depraved and degenerate; words like that. As for dulness, my stepmother is always dull herself."

"She wasn't to-day, so far as I can gather," he said dryly.

"No, indeed. But she was coarse; she seemed to know more about the matter than there was. Do you understand? It sounds silly."

Sir Walter nodded. This was one of the things that he understood!

"When," instanced Amaza, "she said, 'I hear you've had gentlemen dining in the house,' it sounded downright wicked and even worse than wicked; something you'd never come across. I hate a plural. One is the nicest number."

"Two is very nice," he said indulgently.

She was talking like the fool that she certainly was, and that she half allowed herself to be; yet she looked a goddess. You didn't ask more of any woman.

She shrugged.

"Oh, but you come back to one at the last. You have to rely upon yourself alone. I've found that out already."

"You are a cynic, Amaza."

"I'm a degenerate, so my stepmother said. I wonder! Perhaps the words mean the same thing. You can't trust words. People use them as they want to," she declared simply.

Darker and more lonely grew the Park, London

beyond the railing blazed with lights. Sir Walter's arm crept round Amaza's waist and it felt her tremble. The night was most destructive, most bewitching. He no longer felt the cold. Out from the almost invisible delicacy of the bare trees stole a something scarlet. It was a soldier with a girl. His arm was round her waist. They advanced, and with a manner of lurking. Amaza moved along the bench and sat rigidly alone; shivering, startled and ashamed. Some stupendous modesty, mingled with utter loneliness, swept her suddenly. Why had she come? Why was she here? Say that one had flown to Sebastien! Would that have been safer?

"What are you going to do?" asked Sir Walter—he peered through the gloom: it was a brown night—beautiful. It was draped with a tasteless fog. He hardly saw, yet he felt the stiff change of her face—and any coldness fired him.

"I don't know. I came to ask you. I wrote her a note and said I would never come back, never. And I won't."

Through the fog he saw her eyes flash. And she wouldn't. She was that kind of girl. He knew them.

His heart and his pulses were young. He clean forgot the Tamarind Tree and his exact bachelor ways. He might have been twenty again and walking in his father's woods with the gamekeeper's daughter. She had made him feel just so; that freckled, lumbering hussy! How susceptible young men were! Yet he had leaned towards her then as he did toward Amaza now; leaned beneath bare trees on a winter night, as now he was leaning.

It was all the same, with this difference: that was the start and this was the finish of the journey.

"What can I do?" asked Amaza. "What would you do?"

He thought he caught the note of sobbing. Now tears would have enraged him; he was that kind of man. He had seen lots of women cry—and with reason. He had kicked them out of his heart instantly: kicked them out of that cold chamber, in a corner, where, briefly, one, by one, taking a turn, they had dwelt.

Had Amaza only cried now, her life would have been so different. It was ordained that she should not. These things are settled.

"*Life is the House and Man the Fruit of His own Choosing:*" this the book in her grandfather's library had stated. The fruit that she should be, it was in the forming. Say she had chosen to be a Tamarind! It was now too late to say one would be, perhaps a dangling white bunch of currants! Sir Walter, with his light, skilled lip, had grafted—tamarind!

She did not cry. She smiled. She leaned towards him. That slinking soldier was out of sight; the fog had swallowed up his scarlet. She did not feel ashamed or abroad. She had lost that swift headlong idea of rushing out of the Park and away from Sir Walter, who, after all, was a stranger. She remembered now, again (the memory ebbed and flowed), that he had kissed her, that he had said, "I love you madly." One could never be strange after that!

This was homage. No man could render higher. It implied the thing that she had always longed for. She mattered more to him than any one else in all the world. This was wonderful and it should be sufficing.

"What shall I do? Tell me," she said softly, almost mischievously. He looked romantic in this baffling light, and younger than young. Her head was close to his, the glorious head of scarlet and of gold. The little pale face was perfect. He responded to the whimsical smile. A man would be a fool, say he flung a rose aside.

"Come away," he said recklessly, "and let me love you."

"Come away and be your wife," breathed Amaza, staring at the soft, vague night; at the suggested silver of the ornamental water, at the blazing, rushing lights of the world beyond the railing.

"Yes, yes; come away." He was holding her hands; once more his lips were on her hair—as last night. "Let me take you to Paris."

"Paris—yes, yes," she repeated; and she let him kiss her, for it wouldn't be long. Paris leads to other places."

"We can't," said Sir Walter, when the first wonderful pause had spent itself, and when he could see quite clearly the edge upon which he stood, "get married to-night, you know. Didn't you say your things were at Victoria? By Jove, you kept your head, Amaza," for he was puzzled by her. "We'll go and get them. I will take you to a place I know. I will come and see you to-morrow."

There was a cheap hotel near the station; a very select place and frequented by prim women of slender means. This he knew, for not so very long ago a distant cousin of his had stayed here, and he had been to drink tea with her and felt bored to death. He had also taken her to the Academy. He did a decent thing sometimes.

"I will take you to the Denbigh," he said. "It is quiet. And to-morrow, about three in the afternoon, we will talk things over. I'll come round then."

He thought that by three to-morrow he would have done what he wanted to do. That is, if he decided to do anything at all. For his mind was by no means made up. He had lost his head just now upon the bench.

He arose from it now, almost pettishly. This was the end of the journey; Amaza was bewilderingly lovely, yet not the gamekeeper's daughter. He already reflected upon the future and was rueful.

"We must get some dinner," he said. "Then we will go to Victoria and fetch the boxes and drive to the Denbigh. It is a most reasonable place. I hate hotels where they rush you."

"I should prefer it expensive," declared Amaza. "I have lots of money. Fifteen pounds! Just think!"

"Well, it will be enough to pay your bill, anyhow," he said pleasantly.

He was relieved; for he detested outlay without return. And if he was going to abide by Amaza, a matter by no means decided, he would have to spend money on her later on. She looked most expensive; in that quiet fashion which meant the biggest outlay. He knew.

He took her to a tiny foreign place for dinner. She ate hardly anything. He had noticed this in Russell

Square last night and the nights before. She was a girl of no appetites.

She was looking radiant and subdued. Whenever their eyes met, her face changed. She did not blush or look confused. She was thoroughbred, and he liked that. Nothing rippled her serenity. It might be stupid —it was. But it made things easy. For whichever way he made up his mind (and that would not be until to-morrow) here was a girl who would not scream and weep and threaten to commit suicide.

He looked at her; surveyed the strange beauty which enthralled and puzzled him. "Hanged if I can make her out," he kept saying to himself. She might some day commit suicide, if affairs were strong enough, but she would never storm about it first. She would go quietly off and do the thing. That kind of girl! This was the way he regarded her, the solution he got.

About eight, they had finished their meal; that is, he had finished eating and Amaza just shifted her smile. They went to Victoria, then drove, loaded with highly respectable luggage, to the Denbigh.

Sir Walter said to the manageress, who knew him, that here was a young cousin. He did not let Amaza hear; for it sounded elderly and it might startle her.

He bade her a formal good-night and promised faithfully to come to her next day at three, not later, probably before.

This done, he returned to the Tamarind Tree. He had a bedroom there. He played cards and lost his temper. He swore at the harmless waiter.

He went to bed, in a queer mood of jubilation and confusion. For, as he put it, how the devil did he know what to-morrow would bring forth. Here was the chance of a lifetime. Yet how did he know he could pay the price!

He hardly slept all night, and who can wonder? He was a man of small mental resource, and this was a big puzzle. Before daylight, however, he had settled the thing very nicely, and he fell asleep with a good conscience.

CHAPTER V

JUST AN AIRY INTERLUDE

He arose late next day and in a villainous temper. Before lunch he went round to a man he knew in Jermyn Street. It was not Mrs. Huckson's house to which he went, nor was it Mrs. Huckson's end or side of the street. It was as far away as it could be; it was out of the radius of back-stairs gossip: otherwise, again, Amaza's fate might have been different. But nothing and no one put out a single finger to divert her. As for her stepmother, she had already contented herself with going to the family lawyer and unburdening her soul. She explained that Amaza was difficult and always had been. She reminded him that Amaza would be twenty-one this coming May, and her own mistress and with the control of her fortune. She would then, if not before, certainly communicate with him and ask for money. "I wish her well, and I forgive her from my heart for all the anxiety she is causing me, but I cannot have her back in Russell Square with my girls," concluded the stepmother virtuously.

The lawyer agreed. He had girls of his own, he was a susceptible man, and Mrs. Meeks was still, to some, an attractive woman.

She thereupon returned to Bloomsbury and wove a neat little tale which she spread before her friends—and everybody knew that Amaza, who had never been really strong, although she was so well-grown, had gone off to pay a long visit to distant relatives in the country, "where she can have fresh air and plenty of milk and cream," added Mrs. Meeks affectionately: before long she developed quite a conviction in favour of this innocent curds and whey theory. You can believe anything if you try hard enough.

She slept well at nights, she assured her girls, who were accustomed to take her lead in all matters that didn't include clubs and racquets and balls, that one could do nothing more, except, as a pious afterthought, "pray for her."

Amaza was soon going to need as many prayers as people would combine to offer.

The man to whom Sir Walter went in Jermyn Street was one of those who would do any mortal thing if you made it worth his while. He was an old friend who had slipped to an even lower rung of the moral ladder than Sir Walter himself. He was a more virile and a more generous man altogether. Everything he undertook he carried through and—hard! He drank, he gambled and all the rest. He stood up to his middle in the stream where the prudent Sir Walter only dabbled his toes. Consequently he was always in debt, always at his last financial gasp, always at the edge of a thousand things. He would probably end in prison or a Rowton lodging-house. Yet he was nobler far than his old friend Sir Walter Wintle.

He called him Wally Wintle. They had known each other from the first. They had been at Eton together. He was one of the last left to whom Sir Walter was just Wally. There had been a company of them thirty years ago, all young and reckless, all well born and with fortunes more or less considerable. Some were dead, some married, some quite destroyed.

Sir Walter and his friend Freke stood alone in a tomb of dead depravities.

Freke was not shaved and had not finished breakfast. The sun, it was crisp and cheerful to-day, winked knowingly into his untidy room.

"Hallo, Wally," he said, laughing and throwing down the newspaper, "what's up? You never do come unless there's something."

"Yes, there is something." Sir Walter sat down; he sniffed and stared about the place fastidiously, for it was stuffy and there is no charm in another man's cold bacon. "I suppose you are up to your eyes in debt as usual, Dickie?"

Dickie helped himself to another rasher. It was cold and stiff; fat hung at its edge, as a line of pearl.

"You've never given yourself the right to ask, have you?" he said good-naturedly.

Sir Walter had the reputation of "a devilish nasty temper." Dickie Freke was the sweetest creature on earth.

"Well, I don't go round looking for ways of dropping money, but if twenty pounds would help, I'll put you in the way of making it."

"That doesn't sound just like you. What's up?"

Sir Walter explained what depended on this interview. He told his tale succinctly and dryly. He might have been a lawyer, rustling old parchments. Nothing in his handsome cold face told of the eager lover. Freke had the grace to feel disgusted; nevertheless he was decidedly short of ready money just now. His rents, from the small estate to which he never went, came in half-yearly, and he always spent them quite a year before. Freke was the Squire of a tiny pastoral parish. He was spoken of with awe and head-shakings; with a certain amount of affection by older tenants; as a fascinating bogy by the younger generation who had never seen him.

He listened. He did not feel furious, did not feel that —say he were solvent and a sober-living family man— he would have found some righteous joy in kicking Wally Wintle down the stairs. He was used to this kind of thing. This was the air he breathed and the life he led. He did not take exception to his friend's plan, but only to his devilish manner of unfolding it. There was no fury to the fellow. He was brandishing about such cold knives.

"Your one outlay," said Sir Walter in conclusion, "will be a few ledgers and books and things."

"A pair of spectacles would be nice," supplemented Freke, staring and grinning. "They give an air at once."

He was quite reckless and always hard up. He had nothing to lose; he could always play about and be cheerful and see the whimsical side of things.

"Don't be a fool. This isn't a joke, I'm hanged if it

is. I've been awake all night, and I flatter myself the plan is neat. Find out if you can just what a person of that sort would be likely to have on the table. That's all. Half-a-crown will cover the lot."

"There will be man's time, I must charge you for that," Freke told him seriously, determined to play him all down stream. "I shall have to fill the ledgers up with entries and handwritings; all sorts of dates and signatures. I must have a few choice thumb-marks on it and some ink on the covers. It will take me hours to batter that book about and rig it up to look legal. I must get a big inkstand and make it in a beastly mess. A few quill pens would look nice, don't you think? And one mustn't forget a time-worn blotting-pad."

He was getting quite excited and preparing to enjoy himself.

"You see," he added, "the girl isn't a fool."

"That's exactly what she is; a perfect fool; but remarkably good-looking. She is a lady."

Wintle used the word with weight. In his day and Freke's day this word had meant something definite, and when you said "lady" you drew a clear line of demarcation. To-day it means nothing at all. Wintle and Freke were past fifty.

"She is the daughter of one of Mummery's partners, and——"

"The devil she is! That place where your people and my people have banked for generations? Isn't life a joker? They've got a little branch at Devizes. Don't you remember?" said Dickie sentimentally.

"Devizes! Oh, very likely. But, don't you see——"

"A lady! I did not think you were so brave, Wally."

Freke's manner changed. This was not a matter for twenty pounds.

"I remember the two of us swaggering into Devizes as youngsters and——"

"Don't be so infernally reminiscent. I'm in a hurry to get back to the Tamarind Tree."

These two were neighbours down in Wiltshire. But the large calm hills, the placid peasants, the innocent sheep, were rarely enough troubled by them. They had

the grace to keep the country pure of their presence. When they thought of their old age, which they did to their terror now and then, they imagined it in London.

"She had a stepmother," explained Sir Walter, "from whom she has run away."

"On account of you. I know." Freke nodded. "They do. And you're uncommonly good-looking, for those that like a pretty man. I don't. You really don't look fifty."

Sir Walter proceeded savagely, "Well, in short, this plan occurs to me as the only one, and if you won't do this slight service——"

"I didn't say I wouldn't, but what's going to happen afterwards? To her, you know."

The conspirator stared; for they were neither of them in the habit of looking beyond the jump. These affairs —they chose to call them love affairs—were just an airy interlude in life.

"She will patch it with her stepmother, in the end," said Wintle. "Why not? No one will be a penny the worse. She will say she went off in a pet and took to governessing. If the stepmother is wise, and I gather she is, she won't ask questions. Things like that are done every day; you know that as well as I do."

"Yes, but I don't help to do them. This is a delicate business. It may be penal, for anything I know. Twenty pounds is nothing. Make it fifty and I'll buy the books and the bottles of ink. One ought to be red, don't you think? The books must have those plaid covers. I wish I could get a squint at that sort of book. I know. I'll run round to St. James's Church and ask to see the registers. I'm not one to spare trouble."

Freke was tilting his chair and talking glibly. His mocking, merry eyes were on Sir Walter.

"Ask to see anything you like, but you won't get fifty pounds out of me. Why, it's regular blackmail. Don't make that row. It's no laughing matter, and you get on my nerves. And, look here, Dickie, I'll see you hanged before I shell out fifty pounds for such a trifle."

"Very well, dear boy—if your banker's beautiful daughter is such a trifle," returned Freke, tilting farther back in the chair, watching a stray fly that crawled across the grimy ceiling.

"These rooms want doing up," he said thoughtfully. "The landlord refuses. With fifty pounds I——"

He brought the front legs of his chair back to the floor with a thud. He said affectionately—

"It's got to be done, Wally. No doubt you brought a cheque-book with you."

They regarded each other steadily. At last Sir Walter, frigidly swearing, gave in.

"Here it is,"—he fluttered the strip—"and drawn upon Mummery. Now I rely upon you, mind, as a man of honour, to carry through the thing properly."

"There shan't be a single flaw." Freke, promising, put the cheque in his pocket-book: and he seemed to be thinking of something else.

"I shall start a little account with this at the Devizes branch," he announced, looking charming and gay and good. "I will. That's settled. I should love to walk down that dear old street again. I will, and before the week's out. How different things might have been! I'm getting rather sick of all this. Are you, Wally?"

"Do I look as if I was?" Sir Walter fastened hungry eyes upon his friend's breast.

He was a selfish man and therefore always poor. He must recoup himself somehow for this dropped fifty pounds. He would economize through Amaza after their marriage! That was only just; she must contribute her share.

"I was sweet upon the parson's daughter," Dickie said, "and she was sweet upon me, uncommonly. We nearly ran away with each other (which we need not have done, for her mamma had planned the match for years). I was nineteen, she was three years younger. The old people got wind of it and sent me up to Oxford. I wonder if she married anybody else. Elizabeth was her name—no, it wasn't. It was Eileen, and Elizabeth was the lawyer's daughter. When I go down to Devizes, I'll jog on home, and if she's single still (—they say in

good little story books that women of that sort are always faithful—) I might do worse than marry her and settle down decently in my own turnips."

"Your bride will feed you with a spoon," said Sir Walter scornfully, and standing up. "What's the good of this drivel? Can't you keep your head clear up to lunch-time? I do. And I'm off now. I won't even thank you for the service you're rendering. I consider, to be plain, that you've swindled me."

"Then take it into court, my dear chap; take it into court." Dickie rose too, laughing—always laughing—looking bloodshot and merry. "Meanwhile, next Monday will certainly see me in Devizes."

Sir Walter would have made Devizes an interchangeable term.

"We shall turn up at three to-morrow," he said. "Have everything ready, or there will be a row."

"Apple-pie order. Be sure of me. I think, but there's hardly time and the landlord might not like it, that a brass plate would be impressive with my name on it as a Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages; with my hours of attendance."

"And your fees; that would make it genuine," sneered Sir Walter, with whom such verbal readiness was rare.

"You can't get over that fifty. What a stingy beggar you are, Wally! Well, we won't have the brass plate, all things considered. But the ledgers, and the ink-pots, and the dirty quill pens scratched down to a stump, and my own genial manner, tinctured with dignity, that will be at your service."

"And, once it's over, remember that if we run up against each other in the street at any time, you don't know me. You've been blackballed at the Tamarind Tree, fortunately," said Sir Walter nervously. He distrusted this light-heartedness.

"You demand a great deal for your little outlay. I should have thought that—just in my official capacity—I might have raised my hat to the lady. But as you like. There's one thing we've forgotten; the certificate. She'll ask for it. They think a lot of what they call their lines."

"Ladies don't," said Sir Walter. "You're thinking of the other sort. "If she does raise the question I shall say—no, you must say, that it has to be sent to Somerset House."

"She can look it up at any time, remember," added Freke.

"By the time she wants to look it up she'll be living with her stepmother. What a lot of foolish objections you do raise!"

"And what a funk you're in, aren't you?" returned the other one. "I don't wonder. As I said before, I didn't know you were so brave."

Upon this, one affably grinning, the other looking furtive, they parted.

"My official name is Harrison," said Freke, putting his head over the top of the stairs and speaking cautiously. "Don't forget."

Sir Walter walked down Jermyn Street. Freke, at the window, watched. There was no smile upon his face. Not a line of the jaunty, lithe, slight figure was lost upon him; and he could see clear. He saw with his soul for once in a way. He was in a queer mood; sharp, yet vague. He deplored all sorts of things; and he hungered for more! He hated himself and he hated Wally Wintle. He thought of his youth and of Devizes. He remembered Elizabeth—or had she been Eileen? There had been such lots.

He stood staring and dreaming. God alone knew what his thoughts were; he did not often think at all. He was simply inspired by various bodily impulses, more or less rarified. They led him along. He had not, until now, asked himself where.

He watched Wally Wintle walk down Jermyn Street: he looked eternally young, invincibly old, as he passed out of sight.

"It's odd," Freke muttered. "Women fall down like ninepins before a monster of your sort:" and he thought of the banker's daughter, who was a perfect fool.

Presently he laughed, for he could nearly always laugh. He took out the cheque and twisted and fluttered it.

"You are going to be my salvation," he said, putting it away at last. "I'll be a regular Jesuit—do evil that good may come. They say it's a cruel libel on the Jesuit—but it's a deuced convenient theory. I'll bank you at Devizes;" he drummed lightly with his fingers at his pocket. "I'll go on and see Eliza—Eileen."

Sir Walter lunched, then, after skimming through early editions of the evening papers, just as usual, he repaired to the Denbigh Hotel.

He found Amaza looking quite composed, in a naked sitting-room, so small that it was merely a glorified cubicle. She was colourless, save for the marvellous encircling flame of her hair. She welcomed him. He sat down and stared at the cold, narrow limits of the place.

"You've got a private sitting-room," he said.

"Yes, I asked them if they had one. In the drawing-room last night, I did not care for the other ladies. They reminded me of my stepmother and the Langfields. It was home with the salt left out."

"They will charge extra on the bill," Sir Walter told her practically. He had lunched and had no need of salt. He neither looked nor sounded the lover; he had not come to that mood yet. All in good time.

"Of course." Amaza's dark brows lifted ever so slightly. "But I have fifteen pounds."

He watched her. The spell of her beauty stole over him softly, lapped at his heart, restored his youth. He could bear with her simplicities for the time being. He took her hand; his face deepened to ardour and a set desire.

"I have arranged everything for our marriage, Amaza," he said in his pleasant voice, and not beating about the bush: for the least said about the matter the better. You might commit yourself. He had that voice and that manner which charms and reassures all women. Only rarely with Amaza, as yet, had he drawn together the ugly curtains of his temper and so hidden himself.

She looked happy and gay; she looked, he thought, rather as Freke had looked when he maundered on about Devizes. Freke was also a fool.

"It is to be to-morrow at three. Will that do?" he asked.

"To-morrow——" Her lovely face was pale and most captivating; he was enraptured anew. "I haven't any trousseau, you know."

"Trousseau! How about those boxes we brought from Victoria? And you always look so nice." His eyes travelled over her—alive to every costly perfection; enslaved and affrighted—since he would pay for the next instalment.

"Oh yes, I've lots of things,"—she smiled at him prettily, with her hands working, with her head set crooked in her own queer, delicious way (he was in the mood to applaud her every imbecility; she had bewitched him)—"but when one marries! How queer it seems. Is it really true? I suppose it is the best thing that can be done."

"It is the only thing now; and I thought you wanted to. It is too late to turn back."

"Yes, of course." She stared vaguely through the window at the ugly Pimlico street. "It is the only thing, and I never turn back. But I haven't got used to it. Give me time to soak the idea in. Don't you see? I will buy my clothes in Paris."

"You've got lots of clothes."

"But they very soon get out of fashion. What church are we going to be married at?"

Sir Walter fidgeted. Her clear eyes were on him, but she suspected nothing; she was far too foolish for distrust. He would perhaps have preferred a keener quarry: say, instead, that the fruit was falling not only into his mouth, but half down his throat.

"No church at all. Do you mind? With a church and banns and that sort of thing, we should have been delayed, and I think it better to be off to Paris at once. We are not safe in London."

"This instant minute," said Amaza childishly, and smiling. "My stepmother has long claws. She might reach from Bloomsbury to South Belgravia. The chambermaid says this place is called Belgravia. I asked her."

Sir Walter's own opinion was that the stepmother would not trouble to unsheath them. He felt some subtle sympathy with the stepmother; this practical woman that he had not seen. Amaza was all very well—she was positively maddening—yet only when and while you happened to be in love with her. If he were a woman, he would hate the sight of such a simpleton about the place.

"I have arranged with a Registrar," he proceeded gravely, talking in the way that made him look and sound too elderly; that way that made Amaza, even now, take pause and stare out rather wildly at the frightful street. "It is quite in order and——"

"I know," she interrupted. "My stepmother said that Hilda Griffin ought to have been married at a registry office. The Griffins belonged to the Conventicle as my father did, and my grandfather. They gave Hilda a church wedding; it was choral. She was marrying a very rich man. We went. My stepmother said the whole thing was an outrage for a Dissenter. It makes her very angry when chapel-people slap the Church's face and pick her pocket at the same time."

Sir Walter was relieved. "You won't mind a registry office, then? It is quite usual; it is becoming fashionable even."

"Why should I mind anything?" Amaza rippled—expression and sound. "I am a heathen. I can do what I like. I need not get married at all, unless I want to."

Sir Walter wondered if, after all, he had dropped the fifty pounds to Freke in vain. That was the worst of this provoking, this most exasperating, girl. You never knew where you stood with her. He, with the rest of the world, was always putting his gross hoof on the fairy-like webs of her fleet fancy. Amaza said such astounding things, and his was such a literal mind—by mould, by application—that you could hardly blame him.

With all his dissipations, with all his affairs of the heart (he liked to think he had one and inflammable) Sir Walter's instincts were steady, gross and intensely British.

"Sebastien was always calling me a heathen. It worried him. He was a very serious boy, as you'll remember."

"Very serious. I remember." Sir Walter nodded. He continued quickly, being shy with this Sebastien topic, and fearful of remembering too much: "Our wedding will be a drawing-room affair, you know; the sort of thing they have in America."

Amaza nodded.

"That will be nice," she said, watching him.

He was more handsome than any man she had seen, and he adored her. He had said so. His eyes said so even more often than his lips. She was sophisticated enough to see that. He was, however, a little old for one to get married to. Yet you must have some one to take you about, to look after you, to be always kind. This was marriage.

"The office is in Jermyn Street," he told her.

"Is it really? How charming. What number, which end? Do you think Mrs. Huckson might come to my wedding? She was my nurse. She married Sebastien's butler, and they have a lodging-house in Jermyn Street. It would make her so proud to see me being turned into Lady Wintle."

"It is impossible." Sir Walter started. "There must be no one but ourselves. These Registrars are rather—rather formal. Jacks in office always are."

He recovered himself. He bent and kissed her, on the mouth this time. She put up her hand and softly pushed his lips aside; leaving her mouth free again and her own mouth. It was caress and rebuff, in a little touch. She smiled softly at him, with a queer, "don't be angry with me" expression.

He said, not knowing how to modulate his voice, how to compose his expression; for you couldn't tell what she was driving at—

"I will call for you here to-morrow at half-past two. Is that right? At three we will be married. In the evening we will start for Paris."

"Yes, yes." Amaza was nodding like a glad child—and she stared at the door.

"Do you want me to go?" he asked quickly, always sensitive where his vanity was.

"No, not until you want to yourself. But I'd like to get back to my own thoughts; for the last time, and for a little while."

"The last time? A little while? What do you mean?"

She wasn't mad? She wasn't going to kill herself? Or slink off home again or any foolery of that sort, was she? She wasn't—what he had first in Russell Square supposed her to be—a most skilled juvenile adventuress? There were such girls: they were born, not made: women who were always at the age of innocence. Did she see through the dodge? Was she making the complete fool of him? Would she slip through his fingers at the last? He could not bear that thought.

He looked hard into her eyes; limpid, large, blank—yet with puzzling backwaters.

"It will be the last time, and to-morrow is a little while," she repeated. "After to-morrow, I shall belong to you."

"Yes;" he was inordinately fired; he caught her in his arms and kissed her again—ignoring the feather flutter of her breast, the wing-like movement of her arms, "you will be mine, every bit of you, body and soul. Shall I go now?"

"Yes, leave me." The voice was faint, and she dropped stiffly back on the angular chair. "I won't keep you waiting to-morrow. I will be quite ready. I never change my mind."

"Promise one thing." He stood watching her, probing her: as if any trumpery key of his could force that lock! "Don't go out of the hotel until I come. Have your meals sent up here. Refuse to see visitors. Do you understand?"

Amaza nodded.

"I will do everything you tell me," she agreed submissively, and smiling at him, as if she thought he wanted that and had already earned some right to it.

He went off to the Tamarind Tree, which was his particular drug.

Amaza had made him seem a slave-dealer. Keeping slaves was rather nice. He went out, later on, as an afterthought, and bought a wedding-ring.

Amaza was saying to herself, "Soul too! Body and soul! I thought you kept your soul and gave it back to God."

* * * * * *

The ceremony next day was brief; it was simple to baldness. Amaza confusedly felt that she was bartering one of the dramatic chances of her life. She was a bride to-day; and it had always seemed such a marvellous word.

The Registrar was genial; yet kept his place. Sir Walter saw to that; his stiff dignity rather startled her. The Registrar startled her too; but only once, and that was soon explained away.

"I ought to ask you both to tea," he said, staring at the bride at the last and suddenly shooting out his hand and smiling most charmingly. "Could you stay? Do, and we'll pretend it's a breakfast."

Sir Walter declared bluntly, and oddly glaring at this too hospitable official, that it was impossible. He hustled his bride out of the room.

"Go down to the door and wait for me," he said hastily. "There is something to settle."

Amaza did as she was bid, first flinging at the Registrar a soft look; he meant to be kind, and she could not bear that he, a person in a subordinate position, should be snubbed.

She did not go down-stairs. She remained stupidly staring through the landing window, which was dirty and betrayed a broken view of roofs. This day turned her dizzy. She abstractedly twisted the shining new ring upon her finger. She went down at last, holding on to the railing, walking like a child. Indeed, she could not repress the childish, half-sulky feeling—that she had been defrauded of cake, white satin and the rest.

Their hansom was at the door. Sir Walter had told the man to come back in half-an-hour. When he joined Amaza, and when they got in, the horse gave a plunge at the last. It was a fiery steed, for a hansom; and quite

in keeping with a tumultuous happening such as one's wedding. At least he might have had a white rosette at his ear, poor thing.

"My first wedding," reflected Amaza; wondering if it would happen again. She did not wish Sir Walter dead; this was far too definite: yet she did feel that this, her wedding-day, had been pruned by Fate of its loveliest twigs.

"It's a downright Tamarind Tree of a wedding," she thought, and gasped when she pondered upon that stuffy Club. Then she jumped and bent forward; for Huckson was going down the street—carrying a jug, looking to the right and the left of him.

Sir Walter, getting in, was nearly flung upon the pavement by the horse's jerk. Amaza gave a cry and tried to catch at him.

"Oh," she said, when he blundered in and bumped down and banged the two doors together, "I was afraid you were going to be hurt. Did it startle you?"

"No, of course not." He was biting his nails and looking to the right and to the left, as Huckson had looked. "Drive on, cabby; the Denbigh, corner of Lupus Street."

Freke was standing at his first-floor window as they rattled off. There was a very odd look upon him.

Sir Walter, once they were started, pulled Amaza to him gently: the gay wide street began to bob and dance—this, after all, was one's wedding-day!

Now that all danger was over; now that he was out of sight of Freke—and of the policeman who had stood at the corner of Jermyn Street, watching the hansom in a fixed and impudent way, confound him—Sir Walter could think of Amaza. He could sometimes think of other people, once he had conveniently arranged himself. He felt soberly fond of her, and he was full of vague, honest regrets. He had pitied her, in some strange, detached way, as she stood there, so simple, so confiding, in the room with him and Freke. What a scoundrel that fellow Freke was! He would do any dirty job for money. Sir Walter felt quite virtuous. It was a nice warm feeling. He felt that he was a real bridegroom and

that this farce should stand for the rest of his life as a real marriage. Why not? Beside him sat the loveliest girl in London. He stared at that strange, glorious hair. In itself, this was a fortune in personal beauty. With such a crown, Amaza could have triumphed over a freckled complexion and indefinite eyes. She had neither detriment. Her husband—yes, her husband; he was and would be that—devoured the pale, fine skin and dark mysterious eyes. This girl was his to do just what he chose with. Wonderful! What luck!

"We'll get out of London at once," he said restlessly; for every middle-aged woman he saw upon the pavements resolved into a stepmother. "We shall have to hang about for the boat, but that doesn't matter. I'll get out at Victoria. You drive on to the Denbigh and fetch your boxes. Join me at the station. That is better. I wonder if it is better? Shall I tell the driver to drop me at Victoria? Be quick. We are quite near now. I can't make up my mind."

He surveyed Amaza suspiciously. He could not rid himself of this suspicion. For he did not understand her and never had and never would.

"Don't leave me," she whispered back, and her lips were white.

"Of course not. What a fool of an idea! I'm"—he laughed—"a bit off my head because I love you so. We are past the station. And how could you have brought such a cartload of luggage on a hansom?"

"They would have got me a four-wheeler, of course," she said, looking at him in some surprise; the lines of his face were indefinite, his mouth was hot and loose.

Was he afraid? And of what? They were, each in a secret way, living their tremulous hour.

"I thought," said Amaza, with her usual inconsequence, after a few moments, during which they became absorbed into the revolting stucco streets of Pimlico, "that I heard the Registrar call you Wally. What was his own name—Harris, did you say?"

"No, Harrison. And what on earth does his name matter?"

He had been stroking her hand in a covert, tender way. She felt his fingers stiffen.

"Of course it doesn't matter—but why did he call you Wally? I was standing outside, I didn't go down at once, although you said I was to. What is the matter? You hurt me. Are you angry?"

"Oh no, no, no,"—with every word he wrenched her helpless hand the more—"but I don't like people listening."

"I wasn't exactly listening," Amaza said simply. "I'm not a common eavesdropper."

She stared at the yellow, pilastered houses. She was instantly and hopelessly wretched. He was cross: moreover, one had married him and could never get away.

"Of course you were not. Forgive me. Don't look so wretched. It isn't"—he laughed—"a bride's face at all. I expect the word you heard was wallet. They keep their official papers in a thing they call a wallet."

He recovered his good temper. He was pleased with himself because he was getting quite clever. He caught up the hand that he had hurt and softly kissed it.

"Wally — wallet. Wallet — Wally!" said Amaza quickly, and laughing. "Yes, that was it. Doesn't it sound funny? Wallet—Wally! How stupid of me! You will find I'm awfully stupid in lots of ways. Everybody thinks so." She smiled at him very wistfully.

He didn't want her to tell him that. She was the biggest fool he had ever met; yet far and away the most beautiful.

CHAPTER VI

THE PRESENTED ROMANCE

They did not stay in Paris long, nor did it lead, as Amaza had avowed it should, "to other places." She had cherished vague dreams of far, romantic travel. That was before her wedding-day in Jermyn Street. The very day after, life took to standing on its head. The brief spark of chivalry in Sir Walter, lighted by the gamekeeper's daughter years ago, blown into a flame by Amaza now, burned fiercely, sputtered and went out. Never before had the flavour of an adventure been more brief with him.

He was bored by his bride and showed it. He refrained, for the present, from brutal candour; but that would come.

He announced himself sick of Paris at the end of a week. For all his seasoned travel, all over the place, he remained insular at the core: better to say core and not heart; for he had no heart! He was irritated by Gallic gaiety and inconsequence, by the gay little ribbon of laughter running through all things. Freke could do that and Amaza. Freke you need never see again, but the girl one had married. He found himself with a fool on his hands.

She annoyed him all the time, she infuriated him in spasms. She kept his brain on tenterhooks. The things she said! Stupid to a degree—and yet something more than smart! Nothing they could do was participant.

They returned to London and took a little flat in a new building. It was a thin smart place; meretricious, glaring. There was no sobriety to a single line of its architecture. It stood out of London and so far west that it was barely redeemed from the suburbs. In conclusion, it was one of those places where you paid most

expensively for what the management breezily called "service." Sir Walter got savage with the badly-cooked dishes and their French names. Amaza got thin; starved of the spirit. The best cooking in the world would never have stilled her craving.

It was no large throbbing pain; infrequent, sharp and with blessed pauses. That kind keeps you keen and makes you go on living. Hers was just a shallow ditch of a misery, and a ditch that wound on for ever. She had dug it that day in Jermyn Street.

They dragged along together, Sir Walter and Lady Wintle, in the shoddy, furnished flat. He used to grin sometimes when people called her that. Occasionally, anything to break the cursed monotony, he brought a man home to dine and spend the evening. These men treated Amaza with an exaggerated, amused courtesy. They listened to her topsy-turvy talk—with one ear!

As for women! She now never spoke to one, and it was a relief to go into a draper's and ask the shop-girl the price of things. She did not shop just now; her own money was spent and she shrank from asking for more.

The days went, the nights. They led no composite life. Once they did not meet for nearly a week. Sir Walter went out early and returned late. Amaza walked blankly about the streets by day and at night read novels. She had a way of flying for relief to the presented romance.

It was hard to live without letters, that you might read and write. She felt the subtle limits of a cage. It was more terrible to live without Love; since one had always revelled in the little service. She had run to do things for people, had planned slight surprises, even for the Langfields; had enveloped her stepmother, that prickly woman, in a mist of vague caressing. Sir Walter would have none of this: and very soon you did not wish to do it—for him! His contact was distasteful. His dainty, elderly-beau airs were worse than dirt. Thinking this out, as she thought out lots of things, Amaza decided that a nice clear-faced ploughboy person might have been charming. Taking him just as he was, his work-a-day toil hot on him: sun on his skin, pollen,

dusty, in his hair! That would have been enthralling. Perhaps that was the joyful thing you had wanted: to marry a ploughboy, to hang upon his humble needs.

For the present, she was far enough from the pastoral. She lived in a noisy, thin prison, crowded round with other prisons. The walls were so trumpery; it seemed queer you couldn't break them and stream out.

One day, she watched the chambermaid stagger from bedroom to bedroom with a big can of water. The woman was middle-aged. She stopped more than once and gasped. She did this with exaggeration; making a drama of it: she belonged to the class which adores drama. Amaza knew it; people off Tibbald's had been like that.

She ran out of the dining-room (every room in the flat trod upon the heels of the others) and said—

"Let me lift that. It's too heavy."

"You lift it!" The chambermaid's jaw dropped, she set the can with a bump on the carpet, and Amaza went round laughingly filling jugs.

"That's all right," she said, when the last one brimmed. "I must do it every day. See how strong I am!" She showed her firm arm. "And then how badly I want something to do. Now you don't look strong and have got a dozen jobs on hand."

"It's very kind of you, Lady Wintle; very kind." The woman stared. She always did. Amaza was used to that—"it is my hair," she thought.

After that day they were friends, and the chambermaid, in the way of her sort, became rapidly more talkative and less respectful. She would sometimes look at Amaza very queerly, half opening her mouth, as if on the point of speech, and then shutting it with a snap. There was a great deal of gossip in the place about Sir Walter and his wife. The staff laid heads together, from the highest functionary to the lift-boy, and the only conclusion it came to was that "Lady Wintle was a lady born." The chambermaid, however, doubted even this, since Amaza had taken to carrying the water-can each morning.

She used to talk of her daughter who was in service, but "about all over the place, and I don't often hear. You know what girls are; you're a daughter yourself."

"I was a daughter," agreed Amaza gravely, "but my father and mother are dead."

"Law, now, that's sad, and you can't be more than twenty. My Olive's twenty. I sent her a muff and stole, ermine it was, on her birthday. She never wrote and thanked me. Not so much as a picture postcard. I did feel hurt."

The chambermaid sighed. The next day she brought up a fish-basket, with a wild-looking black kitten inside.

"The cat in the basement's had kittens," she announced. "I never see such a cat. I was told to drown this or find it an 'ome."

"It is a gnome," said Amaza absurdly, and with a cry of pure joy, taking the thing from the basket.

How could you help being glad? It was young and innocent, it already loved her. The rough red tongue licked her fingers. You may quickly adore a cat and as quickly forget it.

"I'll keep it, of course, Mrs. Fletcher," she said. "I love cats, and no doubt Sir Walter likes them."

Mrs. Fletcher's remark, as she went down in the kitchen lift with her buckets and brooms, was to the effect that Sir Walter liked nothing and no one save "'isself."

This was true, yet he inclined to Beaumont.

"Why Beaumont?" he asked quite pleasantly that night when he returned.

Amaza answered readily enough—

"Mrs. Fletcher gave him to me. Isn't he a darling? As black as jet. He is six weeks old. He will grow up, get married and produce a line of poets."

Well, then, here was a small black Beaumont, and he was something to love. The flat might be a cage, but you had a fellow captive. Amaza played with him, talked to him, trained him to little tricks, dressed him in bows. He had a way of running up her back and settling on her shoulder. She sat at dinner with him, so. Sir Walter did not mind at first; the black cat went

with red hair. He was glad (since, for some reason, he detested fair women) that Amaza was, in essence, a brunette of the purest. Her hair was just an added glory, an afterthought of flame. He was thankful that her eyes were dark—glorious Italian eyes, almost; and that her skin hadn't that raw sandy-to-pink tinge of your usual red-haired woman. Those unfinished faces made him sick.

He didn't mind the black cat with its blue bow.

"It ought to be red or orange," complained Amaza, looking reflective, "but that would swear at my hair, wouldn't it?"

What did make him cross was her continual jumping about to look after the thing, giving it saucers of cream and little gravy messes in the middle of meals. It was enough to annoy any one. Amaza, in common with thousands of heart-hungry women, was being silly with an animal instead of being saintly with a child. She talked of nothing else. She would break off in the middle of the one topic which Sir Walter considered serious (tales about members of the Tamarind Tree) to say—

"Look at him, with his tail straight up and his green eyes bolting and his baby whiskers sort of bristly! He's just like one of those black velvet cats that you stick pins into, isn't he?"

She bought a black velvet cat for him to play with. This was going too far. She bubbled with bad jokes about the creature—egregious puns, inconsequent witticisms.

Her ways, all through, with cats or otherwise, were naturally exasperating to nineteen people out of twenty. Twenty would adore! But you don't find twenty—until it is too late. Perhaps never.

The climax came one night. Sir Walter burst out of his bedroom, looking cross. When he got cross, his thin profile was ugly to behold, and his eyes, clear and carelessly jovial as a rule, sunk into many furrows. Amaza, nursing her cat, retreated.

"That black devil of yours has been making hay of my collars and ties."

He caught the cat up without further warning, opened the outer door of the flat and flung it savagely down the stone stairs.

Amaza saw it go; saw the arched back, clinging legs and furious, frightened face.

The one thing she loved and which loved her was murdered. She rushed past Sir Walter and down the stairs. The little thing was lying at the bottom, making a weak muffled noise. She picked it up and carried it close, feeling all over the soft body for injury. Her tears ran into its fur. She was crying without any control.

This seemed the last touch and her heart was broken. She wandered out into the main road, where the lights were and the rushing motor-cars. She did not care where she went or what happened or how many people stared. She wore a long black frock, the neck was low. This was dinner-time.

Beaumont lay still in her arms, and she thought he must be dead. He was simply stunned with his fall and with the madness of light and noise where he now found himself. Suddenly he wriggled and sprang, scratching her savagely as she tried to hold him. She had gloried in the sharp whiteness of his claws!

He was under a cab. Poor little beast, mysteriously born to tragedy! Other cats are born, they sleep away their life on secluded hearth-rugs: just as other women sleep away theirs in smug, safe villas, small or big.

Not so Amaza, not so Beaumont! In their case, Fate made an experiment. It is glorious and a privilege to be matter for experiment. For women—always! For cats—who shall say? Who shall solve the riddle of the Gospel of Pain!

She went back now, too broken even to cry. She left the crowd to settle things. Beaumont was already past: it wasn't what he had been, but what he stood for! He had betrayed her in the final moment, as the things you love do betray. Putting up her hand, she found that her throat was bleeding.

She returned to the flat. The lift-boy's eyes got rounder. She looked pretty frenzied, the blood was

running down her throat and into the secret of her bodice.

Sir Walter had gone out. She wandered through all the empty, gimcrack rooms; desolate, hopeless.

She sat reading until late. In front of every page, between her and the print, she could see the blinding main road and the little terrified cat.

If she went to bed she would dream about it. And she would cry about it again. Now where was the use of crying? It neither killed you, nor set you free. She had got as far as that already; to dam her useless tears.

It was very late. She sat listless; the open book on a spread knee. Hours went.

Jumping up at last, she dressed herself; hurriedly, dramatically—as if something were going to happen, which it couldn't. She had married Sir Walter. When you married, things were different.

She went out and walked in the glitter and warmth of streets. She came to Regent Street. She was already consoled; was fascinated and mystified. Everything was quite different. Some one had drawn aside a curtain and revealed the Light—a permanent, rightful light. This, then, was Life. She had been mournful, an alien, in the dark too long. Her miseries of spirit, the silent questions she had asked and asked—what the gift of living meant, and why—they became trivial. The meaning of life, it was just this: to laugh, to look, to flutter down the lighted, happy street.

She had never been out and on foot alone after dark; never since that curious Christmas night in Russell Square—which Square was a cloister!

She saw things that she had not imagined and could not measure. She was all at sea with meanings. The shuttered shops made a background for much, and she adored the pavements. Women appeared arch, men vigilant. There was the merry manner of bells. The air trembled with sweetest conspiracy. There was the air of charmed and charmers. Everything was light, joyful and adventurous; and this was a happy, harmless little outing. She had found romance; it lived in the eyes and on the lip of every woman who passed.

Romance was the thing she had longed for. Her face flushed, her head turned constantly upon her shoulder, making fresh discoveries. It seemed an absolute detriment to be alone.

Passers-by flung her glances, meant for kind; she returned them softly. She thrilled.

Just near Piccadilly one man stared, stopped and then turned sharply back.

Impossible to mistake that head! It was the finest, the most glorious in London. Yet he could not believe in the identity of those red, rippling masses, beneath the piquant hat.

Sir Walter walked behind. He waited until she passed a brilliant light, then caught her by the arm.

"What on earth are you doing?" he demanded angrily.

Amaza looked round. His eyes blotted out the abstract joy of the night. They were saying a hundred things; not one of which she could divine. They were saying, "Have I got the hang of her at last?"

He asked himself this. For if he had been duped he would never forgive her. He wouldn't kill her; he would just kick her back into the gutter and go on. He had done that before now to other women; yet always with a patent leather toe!

"Is it you?" Her happy face went dead; he had that quality, in common with one's discarded stepmother, of making everything flat, turbid and gross. "I'm doing nothing in particular. I was bored in the flat and came out. This is very nice."

She did not mention Beaumont, she dared not. Her glances darted about, dwelling first on this face, then on that. She drank the laughter as it gurgled by.

"What is nice? Not meeting me, I'll swear. You didn't expect it. And yet you might have known you'd run across me—so near the Tamarind, too. But you have always been a precious fool."

She looked at him wildly. This wasn't a voice, it was a snarl. She expected him to show his teeth. He was showing them. He was only a mad dog. She could not trust herself to think of cats—mad or sane!

"No,"—they walked on; Amaza's eyes were clouded and swiftly sad—"I didn't want to see you. I didn't expect you."

"What did you want and expect? That isn't too close a question for a husband, is it?"

He laughed: yet, again, he was certainly no man, but just a savage, most possessive dog. She said so.

"Am I your bone?"

"Bone! What are you driving at now, Amaza?"

"I mean were you afraid that some one would take me away from you?"

"You know enough for that, then; that people fight over bones." He was more brutal to her than he ever had been to any woman. She provoked it.

"I know nothing on this earth,"—she stood still, she spoke with rare passion—"except that I am wretched, wretched, wretched—and I wish you would be kind to me. Only that."

Her remaining virtue up till now had been that she did not make scenes.

"Oh, come along; we must get out of this." Sir Walter hailed a cab.

As they cluttered up the street and turned westward at Oxford Circus, he added—

"Look here, if I can't trust you, there's an end of everything. Don't pretend you don't know what I mean. If I've been mistaken in you all along, if you've been playing a precious clever game——"

"There can't be an end of everything," broke in Amaza from her corner where she cowered.

"Can't there, by Heaven! You'll see." He turned round on her. The light was brief, was tantalizing, as they tore down the shifting street; yet they could see the question and the triumph in each other's eyes. They were feeling for the way out. And certainly they hated each other: yet Amaza could only hate people so long as they were unkind. And not always then. At the first blink of sunshine her thin snow melted.

They did not speak again until they were home and up-stairs, in that box of a flat. On the journey each was thinking hard.

Amaza sat down, looking desperate and beautiful, looking aloof. Sir Walter strode about. That was the worst of it; she had such remarkable good looks. You could not ignore them. Regard them long enough, and a masterful possessiveness overcame you.

He went up to her and sat on the lounge. He smiled, with his manner of captivation. She knew it well by now.

"No good quarrelling," he said. "Forgive me if I was rough. A man doesn't like to meet his wife walking about alone at night in the streets."

"How horrible, how horrible!" She blazed through her misty, wild grief. "There is no harm in the streets; they are pretty and gay and clean. I was happy. And yet you speak as if I had been carried home drunk on a shutter."

"A what?"

"A shutter," Amaza repeated. "The man who used to call Chickweed and Groundsel in the Square years ago had a wife like that. The charwoman from Tibbald's said so. She got drunk and spent his money. Every Saturday she threw his china out of the window. Yet he bore with her. Poor people are God's saints, Sebastien said that; he'd heard it from the Rector of St. Jude's. We used to discuss the Chickweed and Groundsel nice person. No wonder he sounded most mournful. Wouldn't you?"

She calmed herself by these soft childish maunderings. Already she was schooled enough in misery to love the reminiscent. Sir Walter merely said—and he said it often—

"Come, now, don't be a fool. It is no good our quarrelling."

He had not said "fool" with the exact venom that he sometimes did. "Little fool," he added—and made it now a careless caress. He kissed her. It seemed that one might turn words inside out!

"Be sensible," he said, staring. She was a lovely girl. No mistake about that.

"No good our quarrelling," she agreed, and flicking her mouth with her hand, as if to brush a fly aside.

She did this when he kissed her. He had noticed it and was enraged: for he was subtle enough to interpret.

She said, sitting more apart, surveying his face, with eyes of mournful intentness—

"I'm a bone and you mustn't give me away. That may be a pity, but we can't change it."

"Bother this talk about bones." He kissed her again, holding her hands tight down in her lap. "You don't want to change it, do you? Just now, in the cab, you looked as if you would, though. We won't quarrel."

He kept on smiling. Why had he felt so savage just now? Yet hadn't it been enough to startle any man—and especially when you had not been sure of her from the first! And when, by varied, long-drawn experience you were pretty well up in the wiles of women. "They are so deuced clever," he privately complained now; sitting by Amaza, keeping her quiet, watching the perfection of her.

"I would rather quarrel than be left alone," she said.

"You don't like being left alone?"

"Of course not. What wife would?" She stopped and stared at him. How old and strange he was! And she his wife! And the ditch a long, long, long one. When you came to the end of the ditch, there would be Death waiting for you at the undug part.

It was dreadful; and was there no way out? Was there no way of being young, in spirit, free in body—as those laughing women in the glittering street just now?

"I shall go quite mad if I am left alone too much," she said gravely. "It can't be good for any one. Why, I haven't even a little cat to talk to now, or a canary that would talk to me."

"Canaries sing," he said: absent, yet, as ever, obvious.

He was looking at the line of her neck.

"That is their way of talking; just as a *prima donna* sings what she wants to say."

The dark eyes sparkled. She was happy and abstract, now that she was weaving her own queer fancies. She

was translated. "If I had a glorious voice, I would pipe for my dinner every day."

"You don't like being alone?" he asked solemnly; and not bothering about her confounded cat and canary piffle. "I will take you about and show you things."

His eyes, looking her up and down, were narrow.

To her, heathen though she boasted herself, the beloved dead were quite close, and nothing more than a thin sheet of paper fluttered between this world and the next. Suddenly, she remembered her father. That there were other worlds and more glorious, one did not doubt. The question was, would you ever get to one? There were so many turnings. Suppose you took the wrong one, and it was marked "No thoroughfare!"

* * * * * *

For the present, then, Sir Walter was kind. And you need not pester your soul with the continual question of—what, why, whence! You took the days and nights as you found them. You ate your dinner—and each time at a different place. You bought new things to wear. He had given her money. He showed her things.

He loved a music-hall and he deplored the changes which he had lived to see in them. Men of his generation were beginning to complain. Songs were not so silly, not so roaring, not so daring. There was an aggressive air of the quite respectable. Evidently the young fellows of to-day were a squeamish lot. He had this feeling and he stifled it, for it tokened increasing years. His great horror was to be spoken of by his associates as "Old Wintle." That would come, but not yet! By then he would have shipped Amaza out of his life. He would be settled in a snug house near the Park, with a good cook-housekeeper. He would take off his mask of the sprightly and juvenile. Sometimes it slipped, even now, and there were days when he felt that a frankly admitted middle age had its advantages, after all.

For the present he was mentor to a young and beautiful girl; mentor and sole owner. He felt himself to be the King of Showmen. He swaggered about, teaching

her tricks. He cracked the whip. It was folly to leave her alone—say that you still desired her. A girl with her looks wouldn't be alone long.

What she really wanted and how much she knew, he for the life of him couldn't say. For his part, he demanded a normal woman. He didn't want a witch, a fairy, or a consummate devil in nun's disguise.

Which of the three? He could not place this half-witted magpie of a creature!

However! He'd got to live with her, for the present, anyway. He would be hanged if he'd give her up to any man. She was far too beautiful; with all her foolery, she was still a possession in ten thousand.

It was certainly more piquant to take her about and tell her things and teach her life, than to leave her alone. It was certainly safer; it would not be much more expensive. There was a certain glory to unfolding the rose with violence. He scented a new, rare indulgence.

Playing with his ingenious but time-worn simile of the rose, he sometimes thought—

"Suppose the flower is already so unfolded, and by other fingers, that when I start, I shall plunge into the heart of it and the flower falls to pieces."

Well! And if——

He shrugged, he smiled. Amaza wondered why.

You could always throw aside a fallen flower! You could cast the petals into any refuse place.

"I won't go to the Tamarind Tree so much in future," he had promised gravely, in the manner of making some virtuous pledge of abstinence. "I will take you with me to places of amusement."

And so life changed. He was true to his word; he kept faith and he took Amaza about all over the place.

She became familiar with theatres and music-halls. She dined at many restaurants, of several sorts. She drank dizziness by the draught.

"This is a decided novelty for you," he would sneer, blinking at her, as she frugally ate, as she delightedly stared about.

For this was the one fact he had never been able to

assimilate; that she had not been in any place less tepid than a tea shop.

Amaza loved it just at first; for here were people in plenty; and lights and laughter and chatter and looking. One might come across the one most-to-be-desired thing; the perfection she had dreamed of and marvelled over ever since she could think.

Sometimes she had a twinge. This was when she remembered her father and his severe Puritan hatreds. Yet, wouldn't he be the first to say that you must do as your husband told you?

Sir Walter did not spare her or himself; he never spared; while things were new.

They went, after the theatre, or the music-hall, or whatever it was, to some of the little by-street places that were left—and that he knew of old—for supper.

Amaza would be interested, brightly alert in her vision, yet very tired, and sometimes subtly disgusted. This, after all, was not the joyful thing. She very soon found that out. When they returned to the flat, and she was alone in her room, she would cry herself bitterly to sleep, and for nothing—since he was kind! When you had married a man, when he did his best to amuse you—well, what more! And as to feeling that life had again betrayed you! What good in that?

Yet this horror, of having married him, it grew. Sometimes when they sat at home, on wet nights or on nights when he wasn't in the mood to move; on nights when he talked and told her things, she sat listening and looking at him transfixed.

He changed so. He was different. He drew back the shutters of his soul for her to see inside. When she shrank, he, laughing, said, "There was no harm in it. What a hypocrite you are!"

He brought out an old family album, yet with none of his family inside. He pointed out to her the various women in their antiquated dress. It was not so very antiquated, yet it seemed so to Amaza, who was barely twenty-one. The portraits of these unknown creatures made a regular Rip Van Winkle of Sir Walter.

She tremblingly asked herself if she had stepped,

unwitting, into the realm of the goblin and uncanny. Had she married something accursed; a man who dare not, must not die? There were such damned souls. They walked the earth. Had she even married the Evil One himself? This was a thought! Mrs. Huckson, when she was single and Amaza's nurse, had been versed in devil lore, and she told her charge that sometimes Satan had been known to disguise himself as a young, handsome gentleman; so that he might woo and win the village maid.

"I am not a village maid," thought Amaza, quaintly practical and staring at the faces of strange women in the family album. "He is not young."

"I don't like them." She pushed the album away at last. "I couldn't have been born when you knew these people. Please take it away. It is like dead scent on dirty handkerchiefs."

"Not very polite to my friends." He banged the book.

His face flushed. It was a womanish face, as Freke had said.

"We'll go out," he said imperiously. "It is late—and the later the better. You are not amusing."

He was reckless to-night and older than ever, she thought. A taste of his old temper was returning. He had been drinking, yet not too deep. He dragged her about the streets, and when she said she was tired and that it must be nearly midnight, he retorted—

"Thought you liked streets at midnight."

"I'm afraid of them now," she said sombrely, and staring down this panoramic Regent Street, which had lost for her its fairy innocent charm.

He left her outside a shop while he went in to buy tobacco. In a dozen ways now-a-days he treated her as the cheap toy, once desired, and now only fit to be broken. Husbands did this. She watched the other girls, and they waited. When you married, things were different.

She was used to standing about outside places, to being stared at and pushed against. Her pose as she stood was listless, her face quite vacant.

To-night, when he joined her again, a girl came up and said—

"Missed you, Wally! Haven't seen you for an age."

He scowled. He said, hailing a cab, "We'll get home. I've had enough of this. You bore me to death whatever we do, however hard I try to amuse you."

"I'm very sorry. I try, too," she said as they drove off.

"You can't help being a fool, my dear," he returned.

"Was she a fool, that girl who called you Wally?"

"Hang it all, you think every one calls me Wally; it must be part of your drivel. You said that the Registrar did."

"I still say that the Registrar did."

"You doubt my word? You cast reflections on my honour?" he asked in the stilted way he had sometimes; the way of speaking out of a book.

He had, indeed, a dozen or so stock things he had always said and never troubled to understand. And he was very angry with Amaza now; for you are naturally more indignant when you have done the thing! He hadn't any honour, any truth, any decency left; he hadn't very much at the start. Yet the word honour was a shibboleth of his life. It had been part of his early training; it ran, considerably thinned and vitiated, through his later life. Indeed, it may be wrong to say he had none—since he was always honourable at the Tamarind Tree. You keep your club in a clean place.

"I know most things and doubt all," said Amaza.

This was one of her startling, oracular sayings. You couldn't make sense of them; yet they perhaps were not stupid. How could any sensible man get on with such a crack-pate!

"What do you mean? You do nothing but make a fool of yourself. I'm getting so sick of it."

Whenever he said "fool" some hopeless degradation filled her, and she felt that she already swelled the ranks of lost things.

For, so she thought, she now knew every sin there was. He had shown her. She had supped with Sin; rubbed shoulders with it.

He had spoiled her soul; her beautiful, white new soul, which God had given her at the start to do the very best she could with.

"I'm not going to ask myself questions," she said quietly.

"I asked a question, not you. Do you mean to imply that I'm lying?"

"Oh, never mind." She stared at the streets; streets were awful—everything was awful that was not secure home and quiet, screened fireside. She remembered and loved her high-up nursery in Russell Square. Those had been the truly halcyon days. Happiness and innocence would never be again.

"I do mind. You said she called me Wally."

"Was I wrong, then? Who was she?"

"That girl serves in the shop where I buy my ties. She is a decent girl; and a sharp girl too. You don't have to say a thing to her twice. She doesn't trip you up at every turn by some confounded infantile remark. Her name is Wallis. I take a great interest in her sick mother; that's all."

"Oh," said Amaza, with swift abounding penitence, and believing. "How kind-hearted you are! How did you know she had a sick mother? I should never trouble to ask whether the young man at the shoe shop had a father."

Sir Walter said savagely—

"There you go again."

He leaned back, watching her; lamps, along the roadway, turned her face towards birth and death. There were dark moments, when he saw nothing but black outlines; when he felt nothing—save the soft body sitting close. There were other moments, orange-flooded, when he saw her plainer than ever before, and more than once, through these spaces of revelation, she clutched at him and said, staring at the street scenes, "I don't like that," or, "it makes me feel afraid and sick." She usually did it when they drove home late and there were odd sights to see. There were so many things to mark; and, for her, gross things did not lose their novelty, and the terrible fascination that made you feel afraid. For she was always looking; one did not shrink from puddles —since purity might lie at the bottom.

She had now done a lot of looking into puddles;

thanks to Sir Walter, whose ingenuity had filled and clouded them.

He watched her. She looked, he fancied, a little flat; as if pavements and midnight passings to and fro had lost their novelty. He must open one more petal yet. This rose conceit, it pleased him immensely, so that he fancied himself not only intelligent, but a positive poet.

He stopped the cab at a side street and said, bundling her as he spoke—

"Jump out! We'll cut down here. I know—a—place." His voice reeled; yet not with liquor.

"I know a bank whereon the wild thyme grows,"

hummed Amaza instantly. "The Langfields used to sing that. Mrs. Huckson said that Violet's voice was like a comb through a piece of paper. And they would never trouble about banks; it would only be bunkers."

Sir Walter had sent the cab away. He took her by the arm and led her along. He knew this little sly street —well, didn't he! His manner was a gentle chuckle. He had walked down here many times, with many. They hadn't quite swept away the old London yet, with their highly moral Municipal improvements.

Amaza never had afterwards any clear memory of the place, except just this; that the stools were high and the floor sanded. There was no particular vice, nor novelty here. She had been in such places with Sir Walter before and emerged merely bored. Years and years after —not so many actual years, yet whole epochs of feeling —she went about, a happy honest woman, looking for this place, longing for it.

She was urged forward by that fatal fascination which your sin possesses; which it never loses, until the final purging.

She could never find it; perhaps because it was not unlike a dozen others. The difference, this night, was partly in her mood, partly in Sir Walter's freak.

Yet just to find it, to mark it down, make a face at it; look in at the frightful threshold, laugh, weep and run away! That, she thought later, would have been very nice and comfortable. You could give God thanks-

giving for yourself; you could plead His mercy for those who were still sitting upon high stools, with their feet making restless patterns upon sand.

All this, of half sinful, of wholly futile search for a shallow place, was to come ever so much later. To-night, Sir Walter, looking fond and merry, said—

"Sit down. I must give you a new experience. Now then," when the glass he ordered came, "just taste and see how jolly nice it is. You'll find the world changed."

For she never would drink. To-night he would make her.

She smiled, put out her hand, drew it back.

He looked kind; yet it was a manner that made her afraid.

The place was hot and crowded, it was full of smoke and shouting. It bit into your eyes and burned your throat. Even before she drank, which at last she did, Sir Walter seemed to recede, devil-wise, into smoke.

It was hot and sweet and strong, the drink. It was new: and a new thing must charm her.

It comforted, dulled and fired you, all three. It took from before your eyes those pictures of things and people you might have had, or that you had lost. It promised much. It swung all sorts of new delights above your head.

Her face flushed, her eyes flashed and her tongue could not talk fast enough. She found herself saying a dozen witty things. They were daring, subtle, absurd. You had to be clever before you understood them—to say nothing of saying. And the things she did not say, those she forgot before they had time to wait their turn and stream out, they were the most brilliant of all.

Decidedly, one was saying clever things—things to remember; so that you might say them again.

People were looking at her, Sir Walter was laughing. He seemed to be spreading his hands out and saying to every one—

"Now isn't that smart?"

Amaza laughed too. What a noise it made! Such echoes! Some one stole out from the smoke and filled the glass again. She drank.

She resented it very much when Sir Walter took her out into the street again. She resisted. Streets were cold and sensible. Now sense was misery. To sit upon a stool in that warm place, already receding, to say brilliant things and make strange people stare and laugh, to sway them as You clearly did—that was joy. It was what one had been born for. This was clear. For she had been a stupendous social success to-night. Her pulses were on fire. She would go again to-morrow night and all the nights. She would queen it.

Sir Walter had her arm, and he was holding on so firmly that one might think he held her up. She tried to break away. She stumbled at the curbs. She hummed—

"I know a bank."

A policeman stopped tramping. Sir Walter, shaking her, dragged her forward. This was, perhaps, too much. And wasn't it just like her; to do the thing madly and too much! She was reckless and an imbecile, all through. But how beautiful! Even the policeman softened. That face of hers would melt granite.

"I wonder," he said, and laughed, gripping her, "what would happen to you if I let go! You'd be run in for a drunk and disorderly."

A funny light was in his eyes; for he was sober as a judge. That would be one way of getting rid of her, wouldn't it now!

If you could carry that Registrar dodge through you could carry anything. He prided himself lately on his diplomacy, on his poetic fancy. He might do worse than go abroad for a bit. He might change his name. For he had worn the name of Wintle to a vesture of rags—easy to slip!

Some one said, speaking from the corner of the street—

"Take her along home."

It was a threatening voice,—and it threatened not her, but Sir Walter. There was compassion in it and godly anger. It instantly sobered Amaza.

She looked round, frightened, chastened, clear-eyed.

She saw the narrow street. She realized everything—and perhaps more; since, always, she was the willing handmaiden of Imagination. The long surge of her degradation broke right over her, and while the wave lasted, she hoped herself dying.

They came out into Piccadilly and she felt herself being bundled into one cab, just as she had been bundled out of another. As they drove away she turned to Sir Walter, distilling a thousand implacable furies. He had not seen her angry before. Even when he threw the cat down-stairs she only cried. When he met her in Regent Street she had only cried: tears, perhaps with a touch of fire, yet tears. To-night she was dry, she was burned away. Her hair was loosened; that glorious, draggled hair. Her eyes were furnaces. How black they blazed! She certainly looked splendid, yet he was weary of her in all moods. She made you live in gasps. When he wanted tragedy or light comedy, and there was uncommon little difference between the two, he could sit in the stalls and pay for it!

"How I hate you, how I hate you!" she moaned, beating at his arms with her doubled fists: yet she was sober.

"You have made me look lidless at the sun," she said.

That was just one of her things to say; crazy things, taking a lunatic's liberty with words. He sneered into the transformed face.

"Lidless! What are you driving at now?"

"They do it, they do it." She fell back, and fell as far apart from him as she could. "It is a form of torture. I saw a picture in a book. They cut off a prisoner's eyelids, then stand him in the sunshiny desert and—oh, I hate you, hate you, hate you!"

She broke off, deep sobs shaking her. Quite dry sobs—and drunken sobs, moreover, so Sir Walter thought. He felt disgusted. This was natural, for he could get drunk and never show it.

And he was, despite his sensitive retreat from a creature who showed herself so primitive, interested in Amaza's development.

She had surprised him last night (he reflected upon

this as he dressed next morning). He was getting up earlier than usual, to have breakfast with her, and observe her. She was a rose, and there were several petals left yet. Picking petals passed the time.

He found her quite collected, quite colourless; just as usual—and wearing the manner of meek, far-away pride which he could never understand and which he somehow resented. You couldn't dethrone such a creature.

She was established on some mysterious height. He hated her for this; his process was destructive.

She looked up, with her cool, submissive smile—faint, flickering. He stooped to kiss her, which was unusual. To tell the truth, he was really sorry for her; she must be feeling horribly ashamed. She gave him her cheek; a cheek so distant that you might call it merely an ear-lobe.

She certainly did not look ashamed, no, nor abashed, heavy-eyed, furtive—anything! You very properly expected something different; after the unloosing of last night. Yet she was unruffled, composed, quite innocent. One might say that she—well, hadn't lost a petal! Yet he saw her sitting on the stool in that sanded place; childishly swinging her foot, singing.

The maddening part was her mystery. You never felt sure of Amaza, never felt at ease with her. You couldn't gauge her; guilt or innocence, wit or folly. His British nature, demanding daylight and the plain word, detested this. He was so angry now, so nonplussed, that he savagely thought, "If she were not a lovely woman I should like to wring her neck." For, always, her nature eluded his. And, let him scatter petals as he might, she still remained a flower.

She let him kiss her. She said nothing, looked nothing, betrayed nothing. She did not even gurgle out a little inept giggle. He had heard that sound from a woman's throat before now—when petals were picked!

She was just unruffled and distant. She trifled with her fragile bit of a breakfast.

"You'd think she hadn't got a body," he thought, looking at her beneath his wrinkled lids, searching for some sign of last night's fever.

She moved as he sat down, arranging things on the table, watchful of his needs. She'd do that for the devil, he thought. It was her way to wait.

He took up the morning paper and started beating his way through it, as a man does; in the manner of a wild buffalo heading through every obstruction. Suddenly he threw it down and looked up. He was old, grey, jubilant; beyond all, he was quite changed. Amaza hardly knew him.

"My cousin is dead," he said curtly—"Lord Lanark."

Now Lanark was a newspaper name and she'd seen it. Sometimes it made a political headline; for he had the silver gift of oratory.

"Is he your cousin? You never told me."

He grinned. It was diabolical; it spread, stiff, across his queer, quivering face.

"Tell you!" he said. Did one ever tell them anything that was sacred, that was worth while!

He went and stood with his back to the fireplace, folding the paper thoughtfully.

"I must get out of this place. Don't suppose I shall come back. They'll be sure to ask me to the funeral." He fidgeted and bit his under-lip, and then took to biting his nails. "It will be devilishly unfriendly if they don't. I ought to go down to the Priory at once. Can't you get a time-table and look up trains for Amesbury? Lanark's place is a ten-mile drive from there. Never mind, don't fidget, don't ring," as Amaza moved. "Hang it all, they've got to ask me. There is only Edward between me and the title. He was a sickly whelp when I saw him last; that was years ago. They send him to Egypt every winter for his lungs. If he dies, I shall be Lord Lanark, by God."

The expletive approached a prayer. He was thinking to himself that if he did come into that grand heritage and rule over that fair Priory and its lands, then he would be just to his heritage. He would cut the past from under his feet: for he was not past penitence: no man is, when the bribe is big enough. He would start clean; it was worth while. His righteousness was just that—it would be worth while. He would painfully live

down every scandal with which the name of Wintle was mixed up. He would be a lovely whited sepulchre—alabaster! He could afford that. For he had done several things; before Amaza was born and since. Even her stepmother had confused memories of that name Wintle. It had figured in newspapers; yet not as a political headline.

These memories of the past tortured him. What a short-sighted fool he had been! One might have known that Lanark would die. For years he had been an invalid. One might have known that Egypt couldn't patch Edward up for ever. He was quite convinced that Edward would also die, and soon. He demanded this of Edward.

He must go to Lanark's funeral. They were bound to ask him; it was only decent. It would reinstate him to stand at the graveside in such a company. People would have to be civil afterwards. To him, this funeral was a feast: at it, his spirit would drink afresh at the fount of Respectability. A chill draught; yet he was prepared to drink deep.

"He was a great favourite with the Prince," he rambled on, ignoring Amaza's very presence.

He had forgotten her. The conceit of the rose and the petal-picking, it was already far away. It was buried deep with all his other dissipations.

"The Prince will be represented at the funeral, or he may even go himself. The Princess will send the usual wreath with a verse from a hymn on it."

He laughed; Lanark had been a moral man, since it was wise: he had not been a devout one.

"They'll have a special train running for the mourners and the wreaths and things. It will be a county affair."

"I didn't know." Amaza walked in a falter towards the door. "Why didn't you tell me? How odd of you! It makes me so afraid. I shall see them all for the first time, and I haven't a black gown fit to wear. You can't wear things once they look as if they had been worn, can you? And at a county funeral. Sebastien's aunt was county. I can't have anything ready-made, I must

go to Simone. She has made for me ever since I was quite little. My own real mother took me to her. She knows my figure. I will go at once, and if I meet my stepmother there—for she and the Langfields patronize Simone—it won't matter."

Sir Walter stepped across the room and pulled her back. That grip upon her arm, she would feel it for ever. The bruise would get fair again, but the sully would stay. It was a place around which you ought to wear a black velvet band, night and day, for the rest of your life. Wasn't there a woman in a ghost story who did that? Ghost stories had been delicious in the fire-light long ago, when Nurse told them just before bed-time. Nurse had been on hob-nobbing terms with ghosts and cheek by jowl with devils.

He gripped her arm and laughed. It was an insolent laugh and crazy. When he could speak, he recommended her, not to Simone, but to quite another personage.

The morning light streamed into the room. It was always a noisy room, with a blaring east window. It was one of those chambers of torture cheerfully known among agents and the simple folk as "a bright breakfast-room." It seemed to go with the smell of dried fish and frizzled sausages. Amaza loathed such rooms; she welcomed the green dimness of a north aspect: since, say you wanted the sun, you could go outside and lave in it up to your neck.

It lay across their two faces, the crude east light. It betrayed the thin tarnish of the furniture. It showed them this hired place, which had no soul; this just sixteen feet square of a borrowed vulgarity. There was no tradition of beauty, space or peace.

Amaza, the arm gripping her, stared wildly round. Sir Walter, watching, thought, "Oh, she's mad; look at her."

It was really thoughtful of Lanark to die now, just when he did. Apart from possibilities (and Edward couldn't weather many more winters, Cairo or no), it put an end to this, his last intrigue. Sir Walter Wintle should make his bow. Lord Lanark would marry—late,

yet prudently. It was intoxicating, this thought: that one would be rehabilitated.

Amaza was mad—of vision! For suddenly she seemed to know that this life in the flat with Sir Walter was over. Their life together, in this place, in every other, it was already a life of the past. For the present flashes by; it is the past before you can catch at it. She was free of him already. She throbbed with a soft, glad terror. It was what she had longed for; to get away—out of sight and touch and sound. To forget him entirely, if that were possible. To forget the things that he had taught, blot out the sights that he had shown.

Link of spirit, they never had. Link of living was gone. Link of body? Hers protested. Yet you could never get away from that, for, total stranger though he might remain, she had married him.

"This," he said, letting go, looking at her, "is a time for plain speaking. I can give you five minutes"—he actually took out his watch—"before I go to my tailor."

"Your tailor—Simon?"

She laughed.

"If you look like that I'll half kill you, Amaza. Stop this half-witted juggling with words and listen."

"I'll listen." She gave him a strange, superb smile. "Let me sit down and I'll stop throwing balls."

"Balls?"

"Juggling, you see."

Nothing would compose her nor shake her into sense. She was a crackpate. He wasn't going to waste any more time on her.

"Now, look here, Amaza, there must be an end of every sort of foolery. Do you see? Are you listening?"

She nodded.

"To every word," she said gravely, and watching him.

"Well, then, it sounds brutal, but"—he cleared his throat—"you must have known all along and it suited you not to know. That Registrar fudge, it wasn't a marriage. You are very simple, or you pretend to be; it may be a jolly good bit of acting, I'm hanged if I

know. But you really weren't taken in by that bluff. The man was a friend of mine——"

"Then he did call you Wally?"

"Very likely; what's that matter now?"

"And you lied." She nodded. "I understand. The woman, too, at the corner that night. She called you Wally? She was a friend?"

"She was—well, you know." He looked uncomfortable; for he was dainty and disliked being openly bespattered.

"I know." Amaza nodded again; he wished she wouldn't. "Because I myself—— If I'm not your wife, then——"

She gave him a long mad stare and started up, knocking over the chair. She backed.

She wasn't going to jump out of the window, was she? That would be a nice scandal.

"Come and sit down, Amaza." He picked up the chair and advanced to her, looking livid.

"Don't touch me, don't trouble," she said. "I wasn't going to kill myself. Did you think that? Did you think I'd jump out of the window, as you threw darling Beaumont down the stairs?"

She could recall a black kitten at such a moment!

She smiled at him quietly. She was a pretty creature and that smile melted him. He wanted to let her down easily.

"You're not," he flowed on, "sixteen or——"

"No," she interrupted—there was a swift new expression in her eyes—"I was twenty-one in May. It is October now. I had forgotten. That makes a great difference."

As to what difference it made, he did not stay to ask. For no doubt she, just as usual, was prancing off upon some silly topic quite foreign to the issue.

"And you can't be nearly so obtuse as you pretend to be," he pursued. "It is just a pose. Some men might like it; frankly, it annoys me. You are not a country girl; the village beauty who can just sign her name and little more. You must have seen through such a jiggery-pokery. That man—my friend—he bought the

books and doctored them. I made it worth his while; he was hard up. You see,"—he laughed and wished she wouldn't stare him out of countenance with those enormous solemn eyes of hers—"all's fair in love and war."

"You mean that I am not your wife, not Lady Wintle. And I shall never be Lady Lanark and——"

"Never mind Lanark. Just leave that name alone."

"Then what am I?"

Her face was genuinely puzzled, pathetically trustful. Was she really, then, a fool?

"Amaza Meeks, my dear,"—he felt quite tender and forced himself to sound jaunty—"as you were before. There is no harm done, you see. There is no difference."

"Not a bit," she assented. "I belong to myself, as I did before?"

She was taking it fairly well; that was her good breeding. In ways, she was a wonderful girl. Some men, in his position, would have wished to replace that mummery of Freke's by a sound ceremony. For, say he ever did come into Lanark's title, her beauty would make a downright *furore*. But he was sick to death of her. And that was the plain truth. He never doubted that she would gladly marry him, say he asked. What woman in her position would or could refuse? He wished, however, that she looked a little more broken-hearted at the thought of losing him. She seemed simply stunned. He expected tears, threats and clinging; he was used to it.

Amaza looked a lily; the usual unruffled lily; stirred by the wind, yet with stem unbroken.

She stood up. He liked the lily simile. How erect and white she was. She should be a lily, not a rose—he would not pick petals again.

"I can't," she said gravely, "stay with you another hour. I'm sorry, for your sake. But it's impossible."

Here was a turning of tables. What ingenuity! She was no fool. He had known that all along.

"Stay! Why, of course not," he stammered. "That is why I told you. Lanark's death makes a difference; it may make every difference. You see that, don't you? I know you are reasonable. It is all quite simple. Just

write a note to your stepmother and make friends. Say you've been——"

He broke off. He was talking to the impudent thin walls. She had gone. Listening, he heard her softly, sensibly moving about her bedroom. She would be reasonable. She wouldn't do anything extreme. Probably she had been playing her own hand all along.

She came back with her hat on.

"I've packed my boxes and sent them down and ordered a cab," she said composedly. "I've given a nice present to Mrs. Fletcher. She has been kind, and now she is crying. I can't say why. I told her I wasn't coming back ever, and that as for you, I couldn't say."

"Why did you want to give it away like that?"

"It was only half-a-sovereign and an old frock or two. She deserved more. I just looked in here to say good-bye. That was only decent. I thought you'd like to know I was going."

"You haven't been long about it." She was the oddest girl he'd ever met. "Good-bye, dear."

He came close, with the air of kissing. Was he really getting quit of her so easily? A lot of grit in this girl!

She drew back. Her hands hung at her side, but her very manner made an unscalable wall. He looked nettled and walked back to his place on the mat.

"I thought at least we might part friends," he said pettishly. "You've been very abrupt, upon my word."

"We can't part what we haven't been. I hope I shall never see you again; not in this world, not in the one afterwards. I—I couldn't." Her voice wavered with pure horror. He felt it. She went on, talking fast, "I want to be Amaza Meeks, for always; as I was."

"Be anything you please," he retorted.

She put him frankly to shame, and that he wouldn't stand from any woman.

"There's one more thing; I won't be a minute. I am just going," she said. "You gave me ten pounds only yesterday. May I keep that?"

"My dear girl, I want to make some provision. I want to do the decent thing."

How glad he would be when she was gone! There was a foretaste of hell in this last interview. She was one unspoken reproach to him. For he was still amenable to a certain sort of repentance. He could still feel remorse, now and then. Later on, perhaps, he wouldn't be able to feel even the little that he felt now. He would become soul-encased. For the present, he was faintly ashamed. At the back of him he was afraid—for she might kill herself: sometimes the quiet ones did.

"The ten pounds will be enough; just while you turn your face to the wall and wait," she said quietly.

"Wall! Nonsense! You are going to your stepmother."

"I shall never go back to her; never."

"Then what will you do?"

He looked instantly suspicious and hard.

She gave the funny smile, the gesture of airy detachment that had annoyed him a hundred times. He wasn't going to be annoyed again.

"I shall go on looking," she said foolishly.

"Exactly. As you were when I found you in the Square that night; looking into puddles."

"Yes, puddles, perhaps; for you never know what's at the bottom."

All sorts of things were in her face: weariness and great relief; a sense of rather joyful speculation; beyond everything, an expression of horror—with herself and with him. She seemed to be saying exultantly—

"Of all puddles, this is the dirtiest. And I am stepping out of it at last."

This was how Sir Walter read her; yet as to reading her, you might as well try to learn the news of the day by holding the paper upside down.

"Look here," he said. "What are you going to do? I've got a right to know. I'm a—a—," he laughed uneasily, for she looked at him and he didn't like those eyes—"sort of guardian. When that ten pounds is gone; it won't last long with a girl of your habits—What then?"

"I shall earn some more. It ought to be easy for me," she said simply.

"Puddles don't pay in the long run," he said impressively.

What were you to make of her? Up to the last, she remained an enigma, and riddles of every sort had always maddened him. He hadn't any brains to waste upon tricks; other than his own.

"Puddles! What have they got to do with it? I shall earn money. There are ways, there must be."

"And if you don't? Look here, go back to Russell Square like a dear good girl. If there is a row, I'll stick by you."

He felt sorry for her; sorry and vaguely fond. She had stirred that in him now and then, all through—and then laid the feeling prone at once, by some fool remark or the other.

She said now—

"Stick to me! That's the very thing I don't want and won't bear. Can't you understand?"

A shudder went right over her. He saw it.

"Well, then, go to——" he began violently.

"Anywhere, I know," supplemented Amaza, nodding in her odd way. "Ten pounds might pay the fare. Sometimes," she almost fired, "you've said to me go to —anywhere—when I hadn't a penny, but now——"

"Oh,"—it was his turn to interrupt, to play with the topic—and he thought himself extremely apt (for he could fool too, if he chose)—"they'll let you through the barrier without a ticket."

"If I can't make money," said Amaza, who could always be sensible when he elected to be amusing, "then I must go to my lawyer. There is my two hundred pounds a year, you know. I was twenty-one last May. The only thing is, I didn't want to touch that money if I could help it. I didn't want any of them to hear from me again. He will tell my stepmother he has seen me. I shall have to tell lies. That is what I want to avoid; for up till now I haven't told one. I left it to you."

"Have you got two hundred a year?" he asked in astonishment; not troubling to resent the dig.

"Yes. I'd nearly forgotten it, though. I may not

want it. There may be other ways. I shall see. I shall go on—looking!"

That was her last word—"looking": the word he had heard from her so often.

She went out of the room quite suddenly and noiselessly, as she had gone out just now.

He remained for a moment standing upon the hearth, with his back to the grey, sad fire. They had nearly let the fire out between them. The hearthrug seemed to be his natural point of vantage this morning, what with Lanark's death and Amaza's cool departure. Suddenly, not knowing why, since he did not want her, he hurried out, opened the outer door of the flat and called cautiously—

"Amaza, Amaza. Come back. Don't be a fool."

She couldn't be half down. He never thought of the lift: for lifts were late things. Now stairs had gone on for a long time. Lots of things had happened upon stairs, lots of things, and people had gone up and down. Stairs knew every mood of the human heart. This was a moment of violence and simplicities. She would not show herself to that jay of a lift-boy. He didn't think all or any of this. He just sort of felt it.

"Don't be a fool," he repeated, listening.

So the last word he had heard of her was "looking," and the last she heard of him (say she heard) was "fool"! These were their two eloquent words.

The stairs were clean, grey, implacable; hideous stairs, fire-proof, with a coarsely-gilded iron railing. Sir Walter returned to the flat and banged himself savagely into solitude. Mrs. Fletcher had gone down-stairs; which was as well for her.

He returned to the hearthrug. He dallied with his neat moustache, dyed a decent brown.

She would come back; although he was hanged if he wanted her. They always did come back. There was the rub.

He was not young and his ethics of the sex were rusty.

CHAPTER VII

THE HOUR OF HERBERT

MARCIA was walking down Bond Street in that mood of stun which comes first after a great sorrow. She had lived through the early drama of the thing, had been unconsciously buoyed up by the inevitable fuss; now she was battling through the turgid pause.

She had been in London on business. Everything was settled, all provision made. She was, as they say, left comfortably off. Now one must go back home into the country, back to the house where he had died and where she felt sure he would have wished her to stop. She must begin again. She must put his things away. It was horrible.

She hadn't yet got used to it, and she believed she never would; the waking up every morning without Herbert, the falling to sleep every night without him. And then to rouse without warning in the middle of the night, to be wakened, as it were, by the lonely scream of your unsleeping heart, and to cry and cry until your face was all blistered and stiff and the gaunt dawn came in through the window. To know that tears were useless, and yet wretchedly refuse to learn your lesson! It was just the world's lesson—suffering, bereavement, renunciation, solitude. Each in his own degree of worthiness men were learning it and women. Perhaps more women than men, and the women were harder to teach. For her husband wasn't the only dead man; already, there were many more widows more new than she. The severing went on. The nights echoed with wailing. For, always, they are putting out alone to sea, men and women and children, and always there are mourners, bitter, upon the shore.

And some men are more removed even than the dead.

They lie bound in a woeful long silence of living, and only Death shall mark the glad unloosing of the tongue. All around, people, in their degree, were suffering death—and suffering this loss which may be more hard to bear than death. Yet the subtler griefs Marcia could never know. She was shallow and her mood of desolation would be short. Nothing less definite than a literal death, with a funeral to follow; than the breaking of a bank or the breaking of a limb, would move her. She was spared and denied all forlorn and crooked little by-ways. Herbert, in dying, had not broken a heart: he had disturbed a habit.

Yet it was keen while it lasted, her pain; as keen as any sorrow more intangible and more cruel. She flung behind her all select reserves. She had cried and talked openly; she became beside and without herself. She had been garrulous.

She was walking down Bond Street now and alone at night, for it must be nearly seven; and she could have put her head down on the first friendly shoulder that leaned, and sobbed out, "I am a widow." When you are famished, you don't care much what dish you eat from.

She felt that she could have borne it better had the weather been bad: had it rained, she would have cried, "Oh, for the sun." Grief is fractious. The days—ever since he died—had been so heartlessly lovely. There had been a spell of the weather which he—and she—liked best: invigorating frost, glittering, winking sunshine, sparkling nights of many stars. The weather to make you brisk and give you a good appetite. Weather with a joke on its lips, broad humour sort of weather; to tweak your ear and thump you jovially on the back. Marcia and Herbert had responded to this, for they applauded every sort of cheerfulness.

It was close upon Easter. The shops were full of fineries, confectioners displayed vulgar eggs with sweets inside. People went about with an arch of the foot, with a lift of the lip; for there was every prospect of dry, bright weather for the holidays. Holiday times she and Herbert had loved; they loved all the things

they were expected to—popular opinion never got in their way. At Easter, they always went some pleasant little touring trip. Last year they had gone to Nuremburg. She remembered what a delightful young married couple, just like themselves, they had chummed up with at the *table d'hôte*. No doubt that other woman had her husband still, and was going off on some happy jaunt for Easter. The tears overflowed her eyes and ran down her puffy face—for she had cried herself blind, this last week. She felt as if her skin was stuffed tight with warm cotton-wool.

It wouldn't do to give way in the open street. She slipped her handkerchief under her veil and mopped up her weeping. She stood, composing herself, for a moment outside a confectioner's.

"I will go in and have a cup of coffee," she thought, blinking at the gilded Easter eggs.

She could sit quietly down in a corner and argue with herself in the shop. She could say to herself, how silly it was, this crying, crying, crying, when her husband was lying for ever with a stiff cold body, under clay, and you could do nothing for him, nor he for you, never any more. As to his soul! She was orthodox, as he had been. One had never been anything outside the other's jurisdiction. They had not learned nor lost anything of each other, and this is what had made their four years of matrimony so urbanely jog-trot. Marcia could have a very active Faith so long as she was happy, so long as she and Herbert went to church every Sunday morning at eleven. They had been what is called "good Church-people" and had not got very far. Now that he was dead and her life was on the rocks, Faith was no vessel. She didn't suppose—she had reflected upon it—that she would go to Communion this Easter at all. It was so peculiar to be alone. They had always gone together three times a year; getting up unusually early and feeling scared; as at the beholding of some Mystery. They had been rather irritable afterwards and ashamed of their vague emotions, for they had been brought up in the belief that any emotionalism in religion was execrable form. You didn't want to be considered eccentric.

She went into the shop and said stupidly, "A cup of coffee, please, and cakes." She had been crying so much that her voice sounded far away, and the muscles round her mouth played her tricks.

She would drink the coffee and afterwards she would drive back to the hotel. To-morrow, she would go on living just as usual. She would brace herself. This had been her brother-in-law's last word to her after the funeral: "Brace yourself, my dear Marcia. Remember that all your life is before you." This was true, for she was only twenty-five. Not only was it true, but it was exactly what Herbert would have said to Frank's wife, had Frank died instead. Now and again she had the queer feeling that Herbert was feeling annoyed at her complete breakdown; for he had enormous self-control.

Then she would feel hopelessly, "but there isn't any Herbert." Of course she believed in the Church and the Bible and things like that; all the same Herbert's heaven, as she imagined it, felt heartless. Probably he was not remembering her at all. He had gone through and banged the door behind him and left her crying in the cold; crying and beating with her fists upon the panel of that door. He may even have gone out—and not through at all! Was there really any Herbert left?

She would remember, as Frank had reminded her, that the whole of life lay before her.

"I may live to be seventy," she said, sipping the coffee. This was an unbearable prospect. For she had loved Herbert. They had suited each other so well. Theirs had been, so every one agreed, an excellent marriage, and no young lawyer could have had better prospects.

She sat in a corner of the *café* and hoped to be alone, but presently another girl came in and perversely seated herself at the same table.

Marcia, why, she didn't know, was at once interested. She considered the girl to be too languid in movement, too loud in dress.

Yet did not artists say that vivid women should wear vivid clothes? If this girl's face was pale, her hair was flame.

Marcia and Herbert had bought a picture now and

then and considered themselves minor patrons of Art. When they went for their holidays they invariably took sketching materials. Like all strictly genteel and well-meaning people they had a great respect for artistic opinion and an amused, slightly condescending tolerance of artists themselves. You couldn't take them quite on equal social terms; they were so embarrassing, for one never knew just what they would say or do next. They were amusing and one made every allowance. Yet it was certainly a drawback that they lived by their talents.

Vivid or no, the girl was beautifully dressed. Marcia could sum up the cost of a toilette as well as any woman. She very soon got beyond Amaza's clothes to her face. She was soothed and fascinated. It was not only a lovely face, this is small credential from woman to woman, it bore the stamp of suffering. This girl had felt. She also knew what it was to wake up crying in the dark.

Marcia was living in the grip of her great grief and longing for expression. Amaza was always at fever point, of the soul. So, just in passing the sugar, they spoke, and then began to talk and to confide.

Marcia never quite understood herself for stepping, in this way, outside the neat palisading of her nature—a close-cut, bowling-green place—and leaping from crag to crag in a wild country with a total stranger. You did such extraordinary things in moments of bereavement; the very best people did. After she got over her grief for Herbert—this did not take so very long—she would sometimes get hot from head to foot when she recalled her extravagances during those first frightful weeks. And she was piously grateful to God, in that Amaza proved to be an eminently creditable friend. For you might have got mixed up with any sort of woman. You might have touched finger-tips with some positive scandal.

They talked; Marcia confided. She remembered afterwards that Amaza did not tell much. Yet she was clearly "a lady." This, to Marcia, as to that very different person, Sir Walter Wintle, meant something quite distinct.

They walked down Bond Street together, when the

coffee was done; Marcia, between the rattle of the traffic, talked of Herbert's influenza and the quite unexpected complications and the death.

"I can't realize it," she kept on saying piteously. "It was so sudden."

Amaza, waiting for a motor to spin by, or until she and her new friend had safely engineered a crossing, would say, "No, of course you can't. It must have been."

Her words were ordinary, but her eyes said volumes. She was so understanding. That was her charm from the first.

Jewellers' shops were full of red stones; there was a passion that season for the deep, cheap garnet. Amaza always remembered the blood-sparkle of shops that night. Red stones in lots of windows, blue stars, burning bright in the strip of sky above one! You remember such little things. This night was momentous to her; it was destined for another wind of the way.

"You'll be sure and come on Saturday, won't you?" said Marcia, clinging and almost tearful again at the last, as she got into her cab. "Tell him please to drive to the Thuringia."

"Yes, I will come," promised Amaza quite solemnly, "and early, as we said."

She watched the cab turn a corner and then she went languorously down Bond Street, looking swiftly at every passer-by, just summing them, stopping to stare at red stones in the windows. Her air was subtly anticipant all the time.

She had Marcia's card in her pocket. She took it out and read the address—

"Mrs. Pettigrew. The Haven, Grainingfold, Surrey." They had exchanged respectabilities. Amaza had made her usual reference to Mummery's bank, and she had lightly sketched in the stepmother, with whom she could not agree. By happy coincidence, Marcia was also possessed of a stepmother and a mutual hatred. They had got on so badly that "even if I had not been so madly in love with Herbert I might have married him just to get away from her," she admitted.

It was settled that Amaza should go down to the Haven for a week-end on Saturday. Why not? One young woman was the daughter of a banker, the other, daughter of a clergyman. They kept social step.

Yet Marcia, when she woke next morning with a cool head (for the first time since Herbert's death she had not cried herself to sleep), was rather dismayed at the prospect. She had been under a spell. The girl was a stranger. However! There was small harm in a week-end. She took an early train out of London and went down to the Haven.

Grainingfold was a charming village. It had all the necessary features. There was a village green, an old church; geese waddling over the green and dabbling in ponds; a dignified Georgian house or two round the green—yes, and old thatched cottages and white railings. and a highly picturesque butcher's shop; also an inn with a swinging sign. There was all of it. It was what Londoners expect of an English village. Moreover, it was only thirty-five miles from town, and the railway people ran a cheap weekly train. Consequently, all around the village green and in the woods and on the heights behind it, you saw bright red houses of a more or less imposing appearance. Most of them had been designed by a good architect and were really decent in their way. They had, however, the raw drawback of very early youth. Several old farms and cottages, here, there and thither, had been acquired by minor artists and writers and people of the sort known as soulful. And here they lived a very beautiful and lofty life; talking of their feelings, audibly admiring the landscape all the time and giving nice tea-parties, at which the hostess wore odd frocks designed—and very often made—by herself. It was all harmless.

As a rule, when they got strong enough—in their bodily or mental physique—when they, in their jargon, "arrived"—they kicked off all this and went to live with other people, and felt a thousand things without talking so much.

Marcia and Herbert, who approved of living upon the fringe of culture, had annexed one of the old cottages

and made it fit to live in. And they had discreetly visited now and then; yet as a rule, the artistic colony kept (or was left) to itself.

Altogether, Grainingfold was really beautiful and it paid the penalty. The place was a queer mixture of the rural and the garish: one might think of gas-lamps and guttering candles lighting the same room at the same time. For the pastoral life went stolidly on; and the artists rioted in "good models."

In summer-time, people with pince-nez and note-books passed through the place in caravans; sometimes they pitched for the night on the village green. There were other people who led the simple life. Ladies in bright-hued frocks might be seen sweeping the front steps. It was also considered nice to wear a sun-bonnet.

Amaza knew nothing of all this and Marcia not much. She and Herbert had often wished that the artists would make a rule of shaving every morning. For blue-black or bright ginger chins were plainly indefensible. This had been their sole complaint.

Marcia, her doleful black robes making a blot upon the April day, was at the station on Saturday in the usual nice governess cart, and they drove to the Haven.

Amaza had never been so stirred. She had not before breathed such simplicities. She felt the delicate sorrow of spring and the abiding beauty. There were serene hills with shadows in them; shadows that sprawled. There was the sound of sheep; all bells and bleating. In little copses, harebells spread in a blue pale foam, and she saw orchards, with crooked old trees that stood up to their middles in wild parsley. You wanted to clap your hands and cry. A black cat with a bow of the right colour sunned herself on a cottage window-ledge.

"Oh," said Amaza, leaning from the cart and her eyes filled with tears, "he is like Beaumont, yet not so beautiful. Beaumont had a soul. Yet"—she threw Marcia a radiant smile—"he was a fop; the sort of cat, you know, who ought to wear stays."

"Who is Beaumont?" Marcia sounded cold. She was always cold when she did not understand; and, in her right mind, she was naturally suspicious. Down

Bond Street that night she had been quite distraught. Yet she still liked Amaza and was glad to have her for a week-end at the Haven.

"He was my cat." Amaza looked queerly afraid; as if she might say too much. "I was so fond of him and he got killed. That's all."

She shut her mouth with a spring; with the manner of imploring—"don't ask me another question." For she wanted to forget; yet Beaumont remained a beautiful loving little memory—he was the one spar sticking up from her ugly old wreck.

"I've got a dog; he was dear Herbert's," said Marcia. "Everybody likes dogs. Cats are selfish and they are cruel."

"But you're not cruel if you don't mean it," returned Amaza.

Fortunately before they could get into any cat and dog argument the cart stopped and they alighted at the Haven gate. For Marcia was a person with small, fixed views, and she would never brook contradiction. Herbert had never contradicted. How could he when their penny-a-packet opinions were just the same, and when every word they said to each other was just a pleasing lubrication!

The Haven was a dear old house, with stone steps going up to a low door with a porch; with a crooked cherry-tree just scattering its blossom. Marcia led her guest inside.

"It is quite a simple place," she announced, with proud apology, "but we improved it. After lunch I will take you over the garden. Herbert designed it. He had such excellent taste. I think he would have been quite a successful artist had he not succeeded to his father's splendid practice as a lawyer. You'd like to take off your things? I've told them to put lunch in the verandah. It is quite warm. Dear Herbert and I used to take our meals out of doors whenever we could. The sun is so good for one."

Her mind for the present was a little clock; slightly out of order and perpetually striking the hour of Herbert.

Amaza was happy. She had never been so happy before. This, then, was what she had always wanted: cherry-blossom sifting through a veil of yellow sunshine and falling on a flight of worn stone steps; a thrush singing, singing, singing in the boughs. She sat in the verandah, with limbs let loose and limp, with a happy, vacant face. Marcia thought, just as they all thought, "she seems rather stupid." Yet this was no great drawback; since, when it came to brains, Marcia could provide them. She had plenty for two.

This innocent delusion did not make her popular at the artistic tea-parties in the village which she sometimes honoured by her presence. For the artists, also subject to delusion, considered that brain was their own commodity; in fact, as they frankly said among themselves, this was what made Grainingfold so delightful: the natives, gentle and simple, were such fools. Marcia was not exactly a native, yet she belonged to the "such fool" order.

After lunch, Amaza was taken round and shown things. She and Marcia drifted through a shifting scene of green, of gold, of song. So it seemed to Amaza who was worshipping the young leaves. The widow, who was used to it all, merely frowned when she saw a weed or two in her flower borders. She said—

"Herbert used to keep the gardener in splendid order. He wouldn't have dared left a single weed about in Herbert's lifetime."

Amaza was getting weary of Herbert, yet she gravely wished him well. One could not bother about him much, anyway. She was too full of innocent thanksgiving. She kept ardently looking into the soft sky. Her heart soared; she responded to the singing lark. How lucky he was! For he could go up close to God.

Marcia walked about, stooping now and then to pick up or tidy things, saying piteously, "I must have the place in order and kept just as he left it." She dwelt on the beauties of her demesne. The tennis lawn had cost a lot to make. Herbert had spared no expense, and he had used the spirit level himself. "For you can't live in the country without tennis; we used to play every

Saturday." She sighed—and added, with faint disgust, "The old couple who lived here before, peasants, you know, used to grow potatoes there. Just think!"

She took Amaza to her fowl-run, remarking that the hens were pure Orpingtons. Herbert hatched them. Had he lived, they were going to buy an incubator. There were sties; yet she hesitated on the pig question. That had been their last moot point before Herbert died; whether it would be well to have a pig or whether it would not. Nothing had been settled, nor ever could be now. For the presence of a pig might be an affront to his memory. He might not wish it. Yet the absence of one might strike him as a blank.

They had tea, again in the verandah. "Of course we built on this," explained Marcia, looking with housewifely satisfaction at her wicker chairs and red twill cushions. "You wouldn't know the place if you could see it as it was when Herbert bought it."

She said, again, showing amiable disgust, that there had been no bathroom and no means of lighting. There was not even water laid on.

"They burned lamps and had a well," she said. "I can't think how they managed. They looked healthy."

Amaza, not understanding, hardly listening, failed here; by not showing surprise enough.

"It is all so lovely," she said, "so innocent. I think I must take a cottage somewhere close. Is there another cottage? Would it be cheap? I've only got two hundred a year, as I told you."

"Well, of course you couldn't get one like this," explained Marcia in her kind superior way (for she had been left with five hundred, which was ample: yet Marcia would have been superior upon twopence). "But there might be something small to let. We'll ask in the village on Monday, before you go away."

"I should like that"—Amaza's eyes got large and distant; "to stay, I mean; not to go away, no, never."

"But you couldn't live alone," said Marcia.

She puckered her brows; for she had an idea.

"Have you been alone all the time," she asked, "since you left your stepmother?"

"No." Amaza leaned back and stared at the sky. It was her sky, and she besought it. "I was a companion part of the time. Well, as far as that goes, you've got to be a companion to somebody, haven't you, unless you go and live in the desert, or sit on the top of a pillar? Sebastien used to rave about a man who did that. I thought it was conceited and not comfortable."

"Who was Sebastien?"

Again Marcia betrayed her judicious manner of pumping. For you had to make sure.

"Didn't I tell you? I thought we'd told each other everything. He lived with his aunt in Russell Square, when we were children. He is a priest now and settled down in Dorset. His aunt presented him with a living."

"Oh, a clergyman," said Marcia, nodding; displaying animation and reserve.

For she came of a clerical stock herself, yet she hated that word "priest," since it implied all sorts of things concerning which decent opinion was divided. It had reminded Herbert of the confessional, which he regarded with manly, righteous horror—for it broke up homes. Marcia shared Herbert's horror. They divided everything equally; parcelling out their minds in two neat heaps.

"I hope your friend Sebastien isn't anything extreme," she said frigidly.

Amaza laughed.

"He isn't extreme; he is right over the edge. Do you know what I mean? He hates vicars' wives. He would rather march to the stake than marry. He is that sort. Have you ever met one?"

"I can't say that I have," returned Marcia; and her manner added plainly, "I hope I never may." "It is getting chilly." She rose and smiled nicely (Marcia managed you). "Shall we go indoors? I want to show you Herbert's den before it gets dark."

"A den would be more gorgeously horrible in the dark," reflected Amaza, thinking of bleached bones and heavy growls, treating herself to a nice shiver.

She followed her hostess inside.

Mrs. Pettigrew was amiable; yet she gave you a lump

on your heart. She was an emotional indigestion. Amaza likened Herbert to an uncooked plum duff. That sort of thing had been sent up for the nursery dinner now and then in the old days, and Nurse had complained to Mrs. Maxwell about it afterwards.

"This," said Marcia, turning a certain handle with a cold manner of tombs, "was Herbert's room." They entered. She added in a choking way: you felt so dreadfully sorry for her and yet—devilishly—you wanted to laugh, "Sit down, Amaza. May I call you that? I —I've got to get used to this. I've never been right in before, since the day he died. I felt I couldn't bear it."

"Call me Amaza, yes, of course." Amaza threw impetuous arms round the narrow black shoulders. "And may I call you Marcia?"

"Yes, dear, do," sobbed the other one.

So they forged another link; and the chain was already quite long, although this day week they had never even heard of each other.

"This is his latest photograph." Marcia, with an air of bravery, took one from the shelf. "It isn't half good enough; he never took well, it was too sensitive a face. After dinner, in the drawing-room, I will show you lots of others, taken at various times. This is his case of beetles. He used to catch them on summer nights and classify them through the long winter evenings. It is a splendid collection. I am giving it to his brother Frank, who also likes beetles. I think that sort of thing so often runs in families, don't you?

"And the butterfly net,"—she went and fussily put it straight as it leaned against the wall—"Frank must have that too. There are so many things to dispose of, and all of them so precious. Fortunately, his clothes just fit Frank, and Frank is quite glad to have them. But Herbert had smaller feet."

Amaza decidedly got tired to death of Herbert before the day was out. Marcia was true to her word, and after dinner she brought out a whole portfolio of photographs; of herself and Herbert, taken together, also of them taken apart. She showed the wedding group. She said, simpering—and it looked quite ghoulish, "Here

we are on our honeymoon." There were snapshots of Herbert and also finished atrocities, boudoir and cabinet size. He was presented in evening dress and also in country dress. These latter suits were made by a London tailor and fitted too well. You missed the country slouch.

"I don't know"—Marcia shut the portfolio—"what to do with his bicycle. It is a beautiful one, with a special saddle. Frank lives in town and doesn't ride a machine. I shall get nothing for it if I sell it second-hand, and it seems"—her grey eyes got watery—"a profanation to keep it and let the gardener ride down to the village on it, when one wants anything fetched. I don't know what to do."

She opened the portfolio and looked at the photographs, as if asking advice. "We never had a thought apart," she said helplessly. "I wish you could have met him."

Amaza returned gently—

"Yes, I wish that too."

She patted the back of her new friend's hand. She was thinking how awful it must be not to have a thought apart. You might as well be a greenhouse, all staring naked glass, or you might as well be a skeleton, with your mental processes still at work and plain to be seen. There could be no privacy of soul.

"None of these"—Marcia took up a snapshot and then took up an ambitious professional attempt—"do him justice. His mouth, for instance, wasn't a bit like that. It wasn't the mouth you'd expect of a lawyer, at all. It was full and dewy. Do you know?"

Amaza nodded and grew deadly white. That sort of mouth was the sort she did know.

When, at last, they went up to bed, Marcia opened another eloquent door.

"This was his dressing-room," she said. "I show you everything. You are so sympathetic. You understand."

"Yes, dear Marcia." Amaza fondled the hand again.

She looked into the dressing-room and saw whole rows of boots in beautiful trees. She was oppressed by

a sense of masculine primness and assaulted. She was sickened by the smell of dead-and-gone scent.

"You look quite fagged," said Marcia kindly. "This is your room. Good-night. You've been such a comfort to me."

They kissed and parted. Bolts were drawn, doors softly shut. The house was quiet. Poor Marcia lay alone with her grief.

Amaza went round her room softly, looking at things. She had a good hostess. There was everything one wanted. She knelt down and worshipped a bowl of pale-eyed primroses on the writing-table.

It was an old room, with lattice windows. They looked down into the garden, revealing Herbert's grass paths and lozenge-shaped beds. Amaza leaned out. She had never felt more wide awake in her life, and it would be sin to sleep away this silver hour. The little sickle of a moon stared down and smiled. The country was kind. The country would never say fool—and worse words than fool—to one.

She leaned out. There was the beautiful smell of dew and of growing. She could see tufts of a tender lettuce green, as perennials pushed a way out through the black earth in the borders. She could hear birds, just restless in their beds through the thicket; just murmuring love, yet waiting for full confession until dawn.

At last she heard one bird—and it must be the nightingale! Never before had she heard that note, yet its source her soul divined. The nightingale is very wonderful, and you know the song at once, and no amount of rhapsodizing can ever make it hackneyed. Poets, big or little, cannot spoil the song by their own more feeble whitter-twitter. Amaza listened. Her eyes filled. She was too happy and too mournfully uplifted to live. This must be the brink of Death and the glad beginning! This was wonderful. She touched what was—so far—her highest spiritual experience; she fed—yet only for a moment—her vague—most constant hunger. The nightingale ceased: and you fell back with a comic little flop to earth again, and rubbed your bruised elbows. For all the high things hurt and exhaust. They

are only a foretaste, and the body isn't pure enough or strong enough. You tumble back, and your clear, swift spirit frets within its cage again!

She drew in her head. She looked at the bed. She was composed enough to begin undressing.

There was actually a portrait of Herbert upon the wall. Was he feeling glad or sorry now, where he was? It was a photograph enlarged and tinted. She looked at it, her head back, her hands lightly on her hips, her red hair already streaming. Hair-pins were lying in the silver tray upon the table.

"Poor thing! You must have been a very detestable young man," she said, and laughed. "They will lick you into shape where you are now." Sebastien, when he went to school, had been licked into shape. Death was a school, perhaps.

She laughed and spoke under her breath; so that only birds and bats might hear; and beetles too: those beetles that he hadn't caught and catalogued!

He had been most painstaking.

She dropped her garments from her slowly, one by one. The sweet faint sounds, the wet soft perfumes drifted through the window, distilled themselves into the rustic room. The nightingale was resting. She got into bed; sheets with a savour of lavender; Marcia neglected nothing.

When the first soft recitative—harp-strings, and the sob of the lute—came from the low hedge again, she cried. She fixed her solemn wet eyes on the portrait of Herbert. He served a lofty purpose, just for once. And he would have been disgusted at the macaw-like moods of this girl that Marcia was housing: for you kept your moods properly docketed and they were all good grey. This had been Herbert.

"You must have been detestable and—a prig," repeated Amaza, deeply sobbing, "yet she loved you and you loved her. And you got properly married and lived happy and good. You gave each other that. It was wonderful."

The bird kept singing, singing. How pure it was, the bird! Amaza lay in the bed sobbing as if her heart

must break. For the past could never be cleansed, however fair you swept the future.

Exhausted and trembling, she stole out of the bed and rolled round her the dressing-gown which Marcia's hospitable thought had provided.

She leaned from the window; April breath and odours fanned on her face and neck that were so guilty. She was drinking the breaking silence, broken by a golden bird; she was cherishing the dew-smell.

She sat there, exhausted and strangely blissful until dawn. She watched the shy world open; looked into its heart. She caught the first faint warmth of almond branches. You could not tell their tender pink from the trailing promise of the clouds. She saw the thin chain of the Surrey hills, saw the sun step, braggart, over them. He put visions to flight and made shapes clear.

It had been to her a wonderful night; all beauty, all sorrow, all burden. She felt the weight of the pack. Sir Walter had strapped it tightly on and made her earth-bound: she, herself, had added to the burden: for you had to go on looking and probing all the time. And there were puddles. She had stepped over some and splashed into others.

She was unhappy; just as a cat is unhappy when its paws are muddy and it somehow can't lick them clean. No more—not yet. She saw no sharp difference between right and wrong; for her soul remained unborn. No shadow of a penance, pensive, grim, came to her with the sun over the filmy hills. All she knew was the poetic sense of spoiling. Sir Walter had despoiled her; she had certainly spattered extra mud upon herself. She regretted the jags and the smudging. She longed to be clean, with the country. The pretty, clean country!

"I will be good and new," she said, crying, stretching out her arms to the pure airs of very early morning.

She stared into the soft-eyed day. She listened to all the little sounds that were beginning; just chirrup, twitter, bleat and moo: birds and cattle; brief April gusts in the branches, the slow feet of rustic men; sounds of sweet order in the house.

"It wasn't me, it wasn't me, it wasn't me." She looked jubilant, then broke into floods of weary weeping. "I'll forget it. I'll send it all away—just dirty dinner dishes. I won't go back to London any more. It is the bottomless pit. And "—she tried to pierce the elusive fleeces of the sky; to catch the eye of one, as you might say, and send a message straight to God, who understood so perfectly—"don't let it be me any more."

In this spirit, on the Lord's Day, she started on the new life.

She responded to a true instinct: for how can sins of the body stain the eternal soul?

As she dressed, she said under her breath more than once, "No, it wasn't me," and looked at her beauty in the glass and gleefully laughed.

This was a thought to hug to your heart, to remember, to impress upon your world.

CHAPTER VIII

STREETS AND THEIR MEANING

Amaza came down the stairs to breakfast wearing a bright blue frock. She stopped by an open window and looked at the fine silver mesh of the damp May day. The large buds of the tall tulips were closed. Her face was happy, yet questioning.

Marcia, in the dining-room, was fussing with a spirit kettle and looking cross. This soft, dim weather depressed her; she had no eye for silver. In May you expected sun.

They kissed each other with an air of fatigue. Marcia's grief had grown a new skin, and sometimes she felt that she could not endure much more of Amaza. Yet she was so lovable and she did things for you. Amaza, for her part, found Marcia coarse in her point of view.

One could never dream of deserting Marcia, whose life was ruined; moreover, there was nowhere else to go. Marcia was always saying, "My life is spoiled and over." But she said it now quite glibly and smiled in a peaceful, succulent way.

Everything had been arranged weeks back between her and Amaza. They remained together at the Haven, maintaining the frugal and spinster-like upkeep of the house between them. Since one was mean and the other ethereal, they kept a little table. And the widow was putting by quite half her income, which was a consideration.

She was running through her letters. Amaza never had any.

"I shall be quite glad to see Cordelia again." She smiled up from behind the brass kettle; she looked brisk and full of neat social plans.

"Cordelia!" Amaza stared. "I knew one; her other name was Mallard. She was a Fruit House; that is, she was one of the fruits and I wouldn't choose to be that sort. She was sub-acid, sour."

Marcia had a fine, fair bristle of hair upon her face, when you caught her in certain lights. Come to think of it, she was not unlike a large, pale gooseberry!

"My Cordelia is a Miss Mallard." She stared too. "It can't be yours. That would be too coincident."

"Coincidence!"—Amaza spoke coolly—"it's the most usual thing in the world; it is doing it all the time. No doubt it is the same Cordelia. I shall expect now to see my stepmother and the Langfields on the Green when next I go to Grainingfold. They will be in the village shop turning over ribbons and inquiring the price of things. There is an empty house near the church. They'll take it. You see."

Her face looked wan. It looked transparent, as it often did. She was a fragile girl, and Marcia, whose fad was health (it had also been Herbert's), uneasily wondered if her lungs were sound. With Marcia, all emotions were functional. You couldn't run any risks. In the very first stages, people should be sent to a sanatorium; that was only fair to the community.

"Is she a great friend of yours?" Amaza stared woefully at the magic, vague mists of the garden where perfume and purity grew. "Is she coming to stay? If so, I'll run away for a bit. Yet I can't go back to London."

"I don't see why you shouldn't go up for a change now and then." Marcia spoke judiciously and watched her: she was actually shivering, and in May. "I can't go just yet, with my mourning. Dear Herbert"—she spoke quite airily—"has only been dead three months."

She had already recovered. Amaza marked it in a dozen ways; marked it and marvelled. Was Love that —only just that? Then it certainly wasn't the thing you'd been looking for.

Marcia would calmly sit and cut out neat morning blouses in his den. When she drove her governess cart down to the village she no longer groaned out, "I can

see Herbert driving off to the station every time I get into this cart. I would sell it, but second-hand things fetch nothing. I can see his silk hat and the flower in his buttonhole."

"Cordelia and I saw a great deal of each other last summer," she explained now. "She and her brother Humphrey have a week-end cottage on the Green, and they come down every Friday till Tuesday between April and October. They are rather late this year. They've been abroad. It is that cottage with the funny bow window."

"Where the cat was sitting that day I came; the one like Beaumont, only less spirituelle. Is that Cordelia's cottage? It is, of course, the same Cordelia."

"I suppose it must be"—yet Marcia had evidently not recovered from the surprise; nor did she quite approve of things falling into place so readily: the position resembled a novel, and in novels things were never true to life. You read them merely to amuse yourself and get away from life.

"It is Humphrey's cottage," she continued precisely. "They will be down on Saturday. This is Thursday. We shall see them in church on Sunday. That will be nice. Cordelia and I have a great many tastes in common."

"Oh," said Amaza—and presently said "yes," too. She knew now why she had in moments so intensely disliked Marcia and felt she could not live with her, nor look at her, nor listen to her. She was like Cordelia. Now Cordelia one had always hated like poison, and as for Humphrey, he had been poison too. Yet Humphrey had been diluted and less virulent: now a poison weak enough might be medicine and very good for you. He had been spotty and sad. She could still see him lurching in miserable dignity round the Gardens and talking to the ancient man who had said so lovingly "By your leave, missy," when you got in the way of the wheelbarrow. How loving all those people were of the simple Tibbald sort! How clean and frank and true!

"I shall see them both on Sunday," she said, sounding stupid.

She was glad. For the Mallards belonged to the old safe life, and she would climb any crag to reach once more that bracing tableland, from which, impetuously and wholly in ignorance of any other landscape, she had fled. She would have clutched at her very stepmother. "I am Josephine," she thought absurdly, and surveying Marcia's prim person, "at the bottom of my own pit."

Marcia wore a morning shirt with a neat hair stripe. She had that trim figure which betokens the meagre body underneath. She was very like Cordelia.

"We shall see them on Sunday," Marcia was saying. "Cordelia never misses Morning Service. She is inclined to be devout."

"Devout! She was a perfect beast. She led the nice French governess a dog's life and not Herbert's kind of dog, either."

The more Marcia recovered from the loss of Herbert, the more she petted his dog.

Amaza always spoke of "Herbert"; the widow, in her first sentimental days, had wished it. "I like to feel that you did know him and that you make a link," she drearily snuffled. Those days were past: terrible days when you were oppressed by the pluffy-fluffy virtues of Herbert; when your soul struggled under the fat feather bed of them.

Later on, Marcia more than once remarked, "I quite lost my head after the funeral. It makes me quite ashamed when I recall the things I said. It was all so *outré*."

Amaza, understanding, as she always did, yet shocking you by her rough and ready instances, had returned—

"I know. Your emotions went out on the loose. My stepmother was so afraid of those words, loose and tight. They mean the same thing. She was rather too afraid for innocence."

"How did you learn about—loose—and—tight?" asked Marcia.

She spoke in scandalized pauses; her manner betrayed the respectable flutter at once.

Amaza seemed to spring-lock herself: fortunately her questioner was too dull to hear the grating of the lock!

"How does one learn things?" she inquired imperturbably. "When I was a small girl I prayed to be a barmaid when I grew up. I used to pray in those days as if my chest would burst. If I might only be a barmaid and pull a beer engine. If God would manage that for one. It wasn't much to want. They asked me how I knew it was a beer engine. I didn't know then, and I don't know now. My father ordered me to be smacked and put to bed; that was his way of saving my soul. He meant it for the very best. When it got quite dark and I was crying he brought me up the nicest bag of sweets that money could buy. We ate them together. I know just how you felt when Herbert died. You've been blushing inside yourself ever since; you've been in what Nurse used to call a rose-rash. Yet it's silly to feel ashamed; because the things that you feel and do are always the right things for you at the time."

Marcia had said (as she too often found occasion to say)—

"You have no moral sense."

Amaza would answer—

"I'm a heathen. And I believe in giving myself my head."

She seemed actually proud of this impropriety, and skirmishes between the two were frequent.

"And," continued Amaza now, "Cordelia made her brother Wally's little life a perfect misery. He was a delicate and most revolting child. Things never agreed with him. He is dead now. I can't realize that I shall see Cordy on Sunday, and Humphrey, and fat Mrs. Mallard."

"Mrs. Mallard is dead," said Marcia.

"I thought she would be. She ate enormously—and not fruit. Humphrey also had what you call a good appetite. He was spotty and, when we all grew up, Cordy called him dissipated."

"He isn't a milksop," admitted Marcia; and gave a fine shiver, for she had heard things concerning Humphrey; the things that one relished yet never dis-

cussed openly. "As to his complexion, it is perfect. It is so fresh, it reminds me of poor dear Herbert's."

Now when a woman says "poor dear so-and-so," she is cured of her pain.

Amaza felt this, and she wondered if Marcia would marry Humphrey. For Marcia had no sense of humour. She would scavenge out Herbert's very "den" for Humphrey, without a flicker of the lip.

"Mr. Mallard"—she was now blushing—"is one of those people who look as if they had just stepped out of a cold tub."

"Those peach-faced people are so often whited sepulchres, Marcia dear. Humphrey's spots have evidently struck inwards. That is more tasteful for beholders, yet more deadly for him."

* * * * * *

Cordelia was in church on Sunday and Humphrey was not.

"He wasn't out of bed when I left the house," Cordelia said in a vexed undertone to Marcia, as the three walked through the churchyard and round the Green when service was over.

She turned to Amaza smiling benignly, and added—

"It will be a great surprise to him to hear you are here. The world is a little place after all, isn't it?"

This was all the surprise Cordelia allowed herself. Both she and Marcia had a way of taking things for granted. This was convenient. For one shrank from lies. She was looking at Amaza in a queer way; a glance compounded of criticism and speculative hope. Humphrey really must be respectably married to somebody: and he had declared against widows from the first.

It was arranged, before Cordelia disappeared into her rustic cottage with the quaint bow window, that she should bring Humphrey up to Marcia's house to tea that afternoon, and that, later, the four of them should return to the village for Evensong and have supper at the Mallards'.

"It is very nice to have Cordelia back," said Marcia, as she and Amaza returned alone to the Haven, which

stood upon a hill. "She is so resourceful; she has a social genius. It will be quite a cheerful Sunday, for once in a way. Herbert and I were always cheerful on Sundays." She adroitly turned a giggle into a groan.

Cordelia had for Amaza done the usual thing—she had ducked her into a sea of gloom. Brisk people so often did. To escape them, you had jumped into the pit. Amaza was clawing her way back to her original table-land and yet was not happy.

"She is very worried about Humphrey," Marcia confided. "She told me, while she and I walked on in front and you were kneeling in the church, that he is actually threatened with an action for breach of promise by a barmaid. By the way, don't kneel too long in church, Amaza. It does look so peculiar."

Marcia naturally felt that heathens had no right to pray; and you didn't kneel without praying—unless, of course, you happened to be gardening.

"A barmaid!" Shafts and splinters of whimsical gaiety danced all over Amaza at once. "What a joke! You remember that I always wanted to be one."

"I don't see what that has to do with it. You are too absurd. You laugh at things that make other people shiver. You are as glum as an owl over a really good joke. Those women have no principle whatever. She may fleece him of thousands. Then think of the publicity. Humphrey Mallard really is a fool," said Marcia. For wasn't any one a fool to get found out? It was most unfair to your family.

"Herbert sowed his wild oats," she admitted, with that faint well-bred smirk that reminded Amaza of Sir Walter Wintle and of puddle dwellers in general, "but——"

"He had the sense to plough them in when they came up. I know," interrupted Amaza.

She had become wise on arable matters in the last few weeks. She talked amiably with all the peasants she met.

Her face looked stern and old.

Marcia, feeling irate and uncomfortable, and why she

could not say, opened the gate, and they walked in to the early hot Sunday dinner.

With two helpings of lamb and a successful trifle, she recovered. Before she and Amaza settled down in the drawing-room to wait for the Mallards she walked out into her garden and carefully selected a pink rose which she pinned under her chin.

"Cordelia was so sympathetic," she said, and then, without warning, left off sleekly smiling and wiped a real tear or two from her eyes. "We had not met since my dreadful loss. She said just the right things about dear Herbert, and said them briefly."

Marcia's handkerchief was quite limp before she had done with it. Her wound was making a good recovery, for she had sound spiritual tissues; yet it would still smart, say some one knocked up against it.

Amaza said nothing; she just faintly smiled her sympathy. The time was past when one had to think of nice things to say about Herbert. She had cudgelled her brains to some effect at first; and now they were stiff with effort.

Marcia before long began to talk energetically about the Mallards. She could not forget Humphrey's discreditable entanglement with the barmaid.

"It is a serious matter for him," she said. "I don't think they have much money to waste, he and Cordelia. For he is very extravagant, and has been in more than one mess before. Herbert told me about them; a husband has no secrets from a wife. Their business isn't what it was either. Cordelia says that the brother who died had the best head. The only thing that Humphrey can do is to marry a well-to-do wife who'll help him out of the hobble. For that creature is sure to get heavy damages."

Cordelia had said pretty much the same thing, with the private decision that Marcia should be the one to help Humphrey out of the hobble. But he had a constitutional distaste for widows, and he was one of those men who would never do anything that you had decided for him and that you knew was for his good. There could not be a more provoking creature.

Amaza, standing at the window, presently watched

the Mallards walk up the hill. They had not changed much. Humphrey seemed to sulkily lurch, Cordelia was plainly lecturing him. If ever there was a managing woman in this world, it was Cordelia Mallard.

Amaza found this when she was left alone with her; for directly after tea, Marcia carried Humphrey off into the garden.

"You and Herbert were such friends," she said sweetly. "I want to show you several changes I've made about the place, and you will know if he would have approved."

She considered this was a very high compliment, for her ideal of Herbert was high. He had been an excessively noble character—after marriage! Before marriage, all manly men sat awhile in a muddy pond of some sort. The love of a good woman pulled them out, wiped them down and set them on their legs again. This was Marcia's philosophy. And she had found a faint piquance about talking over the pond flora with Herbert afterwards.

Cordelia, alone with Amaza, asked no awkward questions. This is the advantage of your completely self-absorbed persons. They don't pin you into a corner and make you double and wriggle and duck and turn when you honestly wish to run straight.

"You are looking much better." Cordelia stared with hard grey eyes that were very like Marcia's. "Your stepmother told us that a country life was the only thing. The specialist she took you to ordered it."

"Did he?" asked Amaza, with her little smile, and moving to fetch an extra cushion for Cordelia's long back.

"Why, yes; you must have heard him. I suppose you didn't, though. He said it to her in the confidential talk they have at the last when the patient is in the next room. I ought to know; for we took poor Wally to a dozen at least. It was a thousand pities that Wally died. You remember him, Amaza?"

Amaza nodded. "I should think I did," she murmured softly—and recalled the horrid things he'd said about her hair.

"That boy's business aptitude was quite remarkable," Cordelia continued. "He was an irreparable loss to the House. Now Humphrey is fit for nothing but the Colonies. He'd make a good miner or pioneer. He's got no headpiece, and yet he thinks he has. That makes him so dangerous. Humphrey is the kind of young man to cultivate virgin forests, and then when he'd made a bit of money go into the next town and dissipate it."

"Have a little burst. I know." Amaza nodded again.

"A burst?" Cordelia looked cold: in talking to her you might have been talking to Marcia or to one's stepmother. They were all of one pattern. Were there only two patterns of women in the world?

"Men call it that; so I've heard," explained Amaza. "And how or why or where I heard you needn't ask me, for I can't say. No doubt I picked up lots of things sub-consciously from servants and the Tibbald's people, when I was small. You remember how our nurses used to talk."

"We were too big for nurses. We had a French governess, you remember." Cordelia spoke in the old, grand manner. How it recalled the Gardens and the sad, uplifted dusks!

"So you did. She was charming. She used to smile at me through the world's frown. What has happened to her?"

"She had an unfortunate love affair and remains true, which is idiotic," said Cordelia carelessly. "I write now and then; I send her old clothes and things. She has settled at Rouen. She was too wretched to stay out of her own country, so she said. And he, the man, is buried there."

Amaza wondered why Cordelia looked at her so hard. She little thought that it was as a potential wife for Humphrey. Cordelia was thinking "she is pretty in her rather conspicuous way. She is gentle; she always was. She is stupid; she always was—but that doesn't matter. She has a little money and may have more. Humphrey might certainly go farther and fare worse. I shall tell him so. He can't make any objection this time, for Amaza isn't a widow, anyhow. When they

are married I shall live with them. It will be cheaper than having a separate establishment, and much more cheerful."

By the time she had finished thinking this out and deciding how she would attack Humphrey, he returned to the drawing-room with Marcia. There was a pink rose in his coat, sister to the one that drooped beneath Marcia's neat chin.

They all four left the Haven soon after and went to Evensong. This service decided Humphrey, independently of any sisterly hint from Cordelia, which might, indeed, have made him jib. He had given her no opportunity; for he had walked down the hill with Amaza, making the lame excuse that he wanted to talk of old times.

Cordelia grinned as she stepped cheerfully behind with Marcia; and Marcia was by way of being sulky! It would require more ingenuity than Humphrey possessed to revive old times. For he had sulked in the Gardens, and when he hadn't sulked he had bullied all the other younger boys and girls whom he generically lumped as "kids."

He was talking hard to Amaza. He seemed happy and she looked flushed. At church that evening Cordelia felt with peculiar application the beauty of the General Thanksgiving.

Humphrey knelt beside Amaza. Cordy had managed that. He noticed and was grateful. She wasn't a bad sort. He watched Amaza kneeling, marked her way of worship. She stuck her elbows on the top of the pew and held her hands before her face. How white and sensitive they were! The feminine hands that he had noticed hitherto were rather blunted at the finger-tip, were wholly manual in their expression. He was living his first real moment of romance.

He saw and felt the usual things. It was a timeworn mood, a timeworn setting. Outside, the sun was setting and the village was falling on sleep. You heard faint sounds from the Green. You saw violet, red and amber lights filter through the east window and make coloured patches on women's frocks and faces. It set Amaza's

head on fire, this sunset light coming through stained glass.

She had taken her hands from her face and was staring into the chancel, where the good little choir boys sat. She also was feeling: feeling all sorts of things—scared and rapt and strange; never losing her desolate sense of being shut out from all this, of being the foolish virgin. Marcia and Cordelia had well-trimmed lamps. This was but natural, for they were well turned out altogether. As for her lamp! How red the wick was; what a dirty, ill-smelling hopeless sort of lamp! She put her hands before her face again. Humphrey, kneeling close, said to himself, "Here is a saint, a white angel, and what a regular rotter I've been."

It was a little cloying, a little overwrought, this country Evensong, meant at the first merely for monks. Yet these things, not religion by themselves: the rich lights through an east window, the blackbird whistling outside, the shadow of the yew-tree, the tracery of the porch; all the equipments of an ancient church and a country church—they touch you and they softly impel you, while yet you stand at Faith's door waiting.

Later on, they went to Cordelia's cottage for supper. Humphrey paid the rent, his sister spoke of everything as "mine." Yet she indulged him; she found it better policy. He had a sulky black strain. There was an elaborate meal, for he liked that sort of thing. Cordelia, close-clipped all through, lived mainly upon patent foods and liked them.

It was a successful supper-party and a quaint cottage.

Amaza enjoyed herself, and all the more because she nursed the black cat who was like Beaumont.

"When it has kittens," said Cordelia in a matter-of-fact way, "you shall have one, if Marcia doesn't mind."

Marcia regretted the fact that Herbert's dog would certainly tear any cat to pieces at sight.

They went home in much the same way as they had come; except that Cordelia and Marcia were in front this time. Humphrey and Amaza, he instilling the real lover lurch, lingered behind. It was really quite a long walk and the hill was stiff.

He began to tell her things, to show his soul. To him, she was already a confessor and with the power of healing. He was quite frank and wholly sheepish. He kept looking at her profile as he confided. She was something in the line of a holy picture, so he thought. Cordelia had dragged him about looking at pictures sometimes. He had been bored to death. But the living picture fired him.

"Cordy," he grumbled, "calls me vicious. But you wouldn't call a music-hall on Saturday night and breakfast in bed on Sunday morning vicious, now would you?"

"Of course not; only old-fashioned. Real vice is much more up to date," said Amaza promptly.

He jumped and jerked out—

"By Jove! I hadn't looked at it in that way. Then again," he said—and brought out another little pocketful of sheer fooleries, "Cordy lives on starches. She hasn't got a drop of live blood in her body. She can't be expected to understand. There isn't so much harm in all I've told you Amaza, now is there?"

"No. But there might be harm in barmaids."

"They've told you that? How they do cackle, how they do love a bit of scandal."

"They've been rolling the barmaid round their tongues all day," said Amaza.

Humphrey laughed. He looked very young and jovial and nice. The moonlight made him slender and toned down his pink complexion. In daytime, Amaza hated the look of him, for he was too blatantly healthy altogether. His body overlaid his spirit.

"She isn't a barmaid at all," he said, between his careful splutters—for Cordelia wasn't quite out of sight, "she's in a tea shop. I gave her a kiss and a five-pound note on Friday. There wasn't a bit of harm in any of it. I give you my word of honour. She's marrying a fellow she's been engaged to for years. A very decent chap: a master blacksmith down in Devon. You don't"—he looked afraid—"mind my telling you these things?"

His eye was keen and cautious. Amaza was a lovely quarry and you mustn't startle her.

"Mind? No, of course not. Why?" she said, and sighed, and looked all around her at the landscape, which was so beautiful, which was to her, as yet, the only dwelling of the Most High.

Her heart was broken. These swaddling sins of Humphrey's, how pure, how small, how helpless of all true evil they were. They were just vulgar. He was only a puppy playing with his tail.

"You don't blame me?" said Humphrey, and took her hand.

He really looked extremely nice. He was so sorry and so sheepish and so ignorant. She felt a kindly contempt and tolerance. She let her hand lie limp and then slightly lifted it. He held it to his mouth. She did not like his mouth much.

"No, of course I don't blame you," she said quite passionately, and he fancied she was crying.

Yet how could that be? She took it seriously. She was, perhaps, already half in love with him. Women had that way.

He went on talking; she had said he might. He allowed to several things; he was braggart and penitent.

At the top of the hill they stood still, hand holding hand, and stared down at the village. They saw the stock sights, just as in church they had cherished the stock feelings. All of it sweet, yet a thought invertebrate.

There were the quiet gabled houses in a cluster, and with moving lights in the upper windows. There was the burly church. You heard a dog bark now and then, and heard the call and crow of infatuated cocks, who took the cunning moon for day. Behind the hedges and in the branches were birds. Muffled movements in the pastures betrayed cattle left out all night. A white horse, the moon full on him, looked a misshapen ghost.

"If the nightingale would sing," thought Amaza, staring at the coppice down there in the hollow, "then I should die. It is all too beautiful."

She did not love Humphrey and was not going to love him; any more than she had loved Sebastien and Sir Walter and loved—any! But she loved the night

and the marvel of God's world. Sweet scents and subtle sounds drove her wild.

Surely all this surpassing beauty, night following day, delicate season upon season, must mean the Promise. Something hid behind it all; the joyful thing that would make you quite happy. One must, however, look up into the sky and not down into puddles. For, at best, the sky was only reflected in puddles and only on clear moonlit nights. Humphrey watched her dark eyes as they dwelt upon the high branches; and pierced the faint green lattice of them and followed the flecked, fast-sailing clouds. He thought, in the time-honoured way, that a really good woman was a wonderful thing. Emotionally speaking, his knees doubled under him and he knelt to Amaza, for all that she signified. She had actually cured him, through this day, of his constant slang. Cordelia had noted that.

They went on up the hill. A jovial peasant was coming down; one of those drunken, good-tempered vagabonds who is the righteous despair of his village. He swayed about and sang; all of it crooked.

Humphrey said virtuously—

"Don't be afraid. He's a beast, but there's no harm in him."

"I'm not afraid," Amaza spoke when they had passed by. "Let's stand still and look at him going down the hill. Isn't it a droll rock of the leg? I've always liked drunken people—that sort of drunk; the simple sort. You know what I mean."

Humphrey was not so sure that he did; but he was relieved to find that this angel was one of charity.

"A drunken man is not so bad," he admitted, "but a drunken woman is awful." He was talking happily in platitudes, as Cordelia always did.

"Is she?"

"Of course she is. Women must be good or what would become of men?" asked Humphrey, with an air of "you can't get away from that." This, to him, as to Marcia, was the use for good women.

Marcia and Cordelia were waiting at the Haven gate. One could see them; their dun heads leaning together,

gossip-wise. Amaza had seen willow-trees across a stream look so: yet that was a pure sight. With these two impeccable women you felt a sense of scandal and sex whenever they got together.

Their brown hair, dressed alike, was the colour and texture of flue under your bed. Mrs. Fletcher, who had swept the mansions of the far West, when Amaza had been Lady Wintle, described large curves with her broom.

"What a time you've been," Marcia called out smartly —but Cordelia largely smiled; she liked the look of things.

"It seems a pity to go indoors at all," returned Amaza; and Humphrey added ardently—

"I wish you bicycled. I'd take you for a thirty-mile spin into Hampshire. I say, what an appetite we'd have for breakfast when we got back."

"Well, I'm going in to bed," said Marcia, moving.

"Wait a minute, dear," Cordelia stayed her. "You will come to the cottage to dinner on Saturday, won't you? And, Amaza, you'll come too. Humphrey is bringing down a dentist for the week-end. He assures me he is quite presentable. You don't mind? Marcia says she doesn't."

"I shall be interested. I've never seen a dentist with my mouth shut."

Marcia had already gone indoors; twitching herself quite rudely from Cordelia, who, for once, could not be provoked by any one, not even her brother.

She said to him, as they went jauntily down the hill to the village—

"How Amaza has improved! What a charming girl! She makes poor Marcia look like a pale gravel-pit."

We are so blind that Cordelia was quite pleased with her own colouring.

"We don't often see eye to eye, old girl," he returned affectionately. "Upon my word, I'm half in love with Amaza. Does that please you?"

"I should certainly like to see you settled," she admitted, with some reserve. She was beginning to learn that you must drive with a loose rein.

"She was such an odd kid in the Gardens, too," continued Humphrey. "So plain and peculiar; nothing but lean black legs and loose red hair. She was half off her nut."

"She was a very plain child," agreed Cordelia; adding with a sigh, "Don't you remember how poor dear Wally used to chaff her?"

"Rather! Wally and Sebastien came to blows. By the way, I saw in the evening paper last night that Sebastien is kicking up the dust down in Dorsetshire. His bishop threatens to inhibit him. That is only a blind, you know. Sebastien's got his head screwed on the right way; he knows the way to preferment."

They reached the village, rounded the Green and trundled into their old cottage. Humphrey stooped to stroke the cat when it rubbed against his legs. He said—

"Poor pussy! Nice pussy!"

Amaza had nursed the beast.

As for Amaza, she sat sombre at her open lattice; watched by the portrait of the observant Herbert, yet only just at first. Humphrey had said to-night, with a not over pretty chuckle—

"Pettigrew! He was a humbug and his wife knew it. She rather liked it. Some women do; you wouldn't."

Amaza was far enough from Pettigrew. She sat staring at the garden; how it waved and wobbled through your tears!

The awful sadness which never would or could quite leave her; that sadness which was not true penitence—not yet—it tore her.

She had read quite easily what was in Humphrey's heart. She had seen the light in his eyes. Didn't she know these signs? Who better?

She put her head against the white-washed wall and cried—for ever and for ever, reluctant to leave off; letting it wash over her, the salt warm stream.

The dawn found her; dawn and glad birds and the fully opened tulips down there in Herbert's beautiful flower-beds.

Long ago, she had jumped from the tableland which

was Home and Innocence. She had thudded to the very bottom of the pit.

She was climbing back, yet how recovery hurt. Each fresh step was a new wound and there were yet more beetling crags above your head. The things that you caught at, on your return journey, how sharp they were, what teeth!

She looked quite stupidly at her hands, that were whole, that, in the green moonlight, looked so unearthly. She thought of them as her heart—a lacerated heart. Was there no other wounded Heart that might feel for it? As she stared, she looked stupid; an absolute idiot, as her stepmother had said; a fool—to quote Sir Walter!

It was a long climb back. She was only half-way up the broken side of the pit, and she knew it. When you got to the top again and heaved yourself breathlessly over the edge and looked about you once more and felt the breeze and saw the sun and took sure foothold, would it be the same landscape that one saw? No, no—never.

She had stepped so lightly from the place where once she stood, and not again do you find the same footing. Old pathways overgrow behind you.

She blamed no one; first to last, it was never in her much to blame. She hardly regretted. It had been Fate, and how could you hope to fight it? You—of yourself—and never provided with a true weapon against ill! She owed, so far, no regrets towards any living creature. Her debt was to her own soul. It clamoured, how loud and fast it clamoured for repayment. And you could not pay; long ago, you had broken the bank. A broken bank, an empty lamp! She laughed and looked fantastic. What a mixing up of miseries! You thought of such lots of things, and all at once; your mind was a garden; wild, much overgrown with simile.

Humphrey already loved her. This she knew. He loved her to his measure! She was certainly not worthy to take that gift—a little too solid and square and strictly useful—which he was already holding out in his hulking way. Yet Humphrey did not matter so much; these men never really mattered. Now trees and clouds did.

It was the sense of being sullied that was wringing her to-night, the sense of having removed yourself and for ever, as it now seemed, from full communion with the pure beauty of the world out there. God had started you out so clean; so washed and brushed and combed for the School of Life. She had thought this thought often as she watched the Grainingfold children cross the Green to the village school.

She loved the landscape; loved it constant, most and only, so far. It was a veil and you saw Heaven through it. A delicious Heaven, always shifting, never letting you get tired, always with something fresh to show, always feeding you on new-sprung most delicate joys. And she was not worthy to tread young grass, to peer through golden mists at pear and cherry blossom, to watch buds open and branches break to life, to listen to the lark and thrush.

London streets got between her and all this. Streets and their meaning! You could not toss the past away —just dirty dinner dishes. So much was plain. Humphrey's suggested ardours had proved it. Yet she would go on trying; and she amused herself now by pretending that the dishes were here at hand and real, and that you heard their doleful smashings as you flung them over your shoulder. You could trifle with your tragedy and find a little fun.

She did not know why she did it (your truest instincts you cannot trace, yet must obey), but, at the beginning of this long watery vigil, she had turned Herbert's face to the wall.

No man should see her misery. She hated men and with reason. The moon was on this smirking portrait of the dead. It told truth. Amaza vaguely felt that Herbert had been worse than she was.

Women were frogs and men threw stones.

CHAPTER IX

MATTER FOR MIRTH, MATTER FOR MOURNING

THEY had been officially engaged just fifteen minutes. Amaza knew this by the twice chiming of the village clock down there in the village; Humphrey was not as yet in the mood to learn, by any token.

It had chimed half-past three when he said—

"Will you marry me, Amaza darling, and make a decent chap of me?"

It was chiming a quarter to four now. She had flung him a strange look and he was kissing her: without any reserve and in lots of places. He sought her brows, her ears, her cheek and neck; he came back for ever and ardently to her quiet mouth.

It was chiming a quarter to four. In a minute or two one would be able to say gently—

"We ought to be getting back to the house. Marcia makes the tea at four."

Amaza was trembling. When Humphrey proposed she had flung him that queer look; of gratitude and wonder and—what else? He was puzzled by it, and he thought complacently to himself, "She's been in love with me all along, nice little soul!"

Humphrey was what the world calls "a genuine fellow." There was very little harm in him and less brains.

The two were sitting in the kind green shelter of that oak and hazel copse that grew behind the Haven. It was a Saturday afternoon and August. Parched leaves rustled above one's head and turned untimely yellow. It had been an unusually dry summer. Humphrey, Marcia and Cordelia had congratulated Providence on it repeatedly; you could play tennis every afternoon. You could

go to picnics and parties in your best frock without fear or scruple. Amaza had sometimes longed for those soft dim showers which make the world look large and very green, which extend its boundaries.

He had proposed and she had accepted. The odd flash died on her face at once. He wished her to be placid and clear. He would not have her of the emotional barmaid and tea-shop sort, for a man never married the girl he first fluttered about with.

Humphrey was already reformed; just as Herbert had been when he became engaged to Marcia. When they were married he would enjoy telling Amaza all the funny little stories of his bachelor dissipations. For the funniest things were those you mustn't talk about except to your wife.

Amaza leaned back hard against the tree-trunk; yet Humphrey's arm stole between her and it. She shut her eyes for a minute. She was so grateful to him. She would be patient with him always and very good. For he was leading her back to the peaceful security of the home fold. Already she was off the hillside where, always alone, she had wandered, the silly, curious sheep —afraid of ravening wolves, yet seeking them.

"We must be getting back to Marcia," she said gently, opening her eyes and reaching out for her gloves.

"Look here,"—Humphrey caught the fingers and kissed them, of course. He had a right to do any mortal thing he liked, but she wished he'd be quick—"I bought a ring. I dared to hope. I—I thought;"—he was looking gawky beneath her slow cool glance—"I felt sure, you know, that——"

"You were quite right to feel sure, dear Humphrey. Of course. Why not?" she said tenderly.

She had been sure from the first.

"Its opals. They are unlucky. When I showed it to Cordy, she bullied me as usual. But you were born in the month for opals. I looked it up in a book."

"I love opals." Amaza stared at the ring in its case. "And how could they be unlucky when we——"

"Love each other," finished Humphrey joyously.

"That's just what I said to Cordy, and I knew you'd feel the same. We are so alike. That's what drew me to you at the first."

She stuck out a wooden-looking finger and he put the ring on. He was looking radiant, and Amaza loved him to be happy. Wasn't it beautiful that you had the power to make a person happy? Yet she wished he wouldn't look so loose and hot.

"We don't want to make them cross, Marcia and Cordelia, do we?" she asked, and standing up and staring vacantly down the rustling archways of the wood.

"I don't want to remember that they are alive," returned Humphrey, "but we'll move on, if you like."

He was in the rare, real mood of romance, and he confusedly felt that Amaza was cheating him of something.

"I do like," she said, turning white, "and you remind me of a London policeman when you say 'move on.'"

They went on walking through the wood. Amaza looked at the handsome ring upon her finger, Humphrey was kicking at sticks and scattering leaves and prodding at tussocks of pale grass with his walking-stick. He stopped to frankly kiss his betrothed whenever he thought he would. He looked rather wistfully at her beautiful, calm face.

"You'll have to make things up with your stepmother now," he said, as they emerged from the wood and started walking up the pasture slope. "You've both carried it off very well, but, of course, there was some upset between you. Cordy and I have always known that, and I don't wonder, for Mrs. Meeks is a holy terror."

"Hardly holy," returned Amaza, and frowning faintly in a puzzled way, as if she tried hard to exactly define that word holy.

He had seen her look just so in the Russell Square Gardens long ago, when she was a plain and stupid little girl. The uneasy thought came to him now of, "Is there anything wrong with her brain? Was that the reason she was sent away?"

The next moment he was kissing her and thinking how lovely she was and how lucky he!

"We must get married from her house. We must do the decent thing," he said.

"The decent and the holy thing—yes," returned Amaza promptly, and opening her eyes wide. "There is Marcia looking out for us on the verandah. I expect we are late and she will be vexed."

"Hang Marcia! You won't have to stand her airs much longer. She," he guggled, "had her eye on me, you know. She is one of those widows who mean to settle again as soon as it's proper. But you bowled me over from the first, Amaza. She assured me the other day that my feet were the same size as Herbert's. She sounded Cordy as to whether I'd like to buy his boots at a bargain. He left a dozen pairs behind him."

They laughed, and the village clock chimed again. It was four. Humphrey heard this time. "At three," he thought, "I was screwing up my courage, and I needn't have been in such a blue funk after all!"

Humphrey was one of those men who not only speak, but think in slang.

They stepped on to the verandah, where the deck-chairs and red twill cushions were; and Marcia, measuring tea with the manner of a martinet, and Cordelia smiling. She flung just one quick glance at the lovers, and then she knew. Humphrey would now settle down with a nice girl for a wife. He would look after the business better; for in some ways, as he ruefully owned, the business latterly had been rather going to the dogs. Cordelia had that reverence for the House which her brother Wally had. What a loss Wally was to the House. Had he lived he would have extended and glorified it. Humphrey could have been bought out. He could have retired on a handsome income and been a sleeping partner. He could have lived in the country and gone out ratting with a good terrier. He could have come up to London now and then for an unbridled round of his vulgar, witless dissipations. Humphrey, now, smiled at his sister; had he been in a less exalted mood, you might have added that he winked.

"Amaza and I," he said simply, "have made up our minds to get married. It was up there." He pointed backwards to the wood. "We must go back on Monday and carve our names upon a tree."

So it was told, and Amaza was kissed by Marcia and Cordelia; the seal was put upon her redemption: yet little did these estimable young women know the seal that they were setting. Cordelia looked quite pretty, and Marcia cried a little on reception of the betrothal news. This was only natural, when one remembered the comparatively recent death of Herbert.

"It brings it all back to me so acutely," she said convulsively to her friend behind the spirit kettle: the lovers were looking at each other, so that one need not bother about them.

"I'm sure it does, darling," said Cordelia, with complete sympathy. "Shall I pour out this afternoon?"

"Oh no, thank you, I can manage." Marcia wiped her eyes; they looked red and hard and angry.

For all that, it was a merry little tea-party, and the thing that pleased Cordelia most was Amaza's ductile air. She sat there smiling, her head crooked, her lovely eyes watchful and moving attentively from one mouth to the other, as the other three talked. Humphrey held her hand, whenever he could get free of his cup and saucer and his honest hunk of cake. He was perfectly frank in his feelings. Why not? These open attentions, which might have embarrassed some girls, did not appear to distress Amaza. They just passed over her head.

"There is a certain restfulness to a really stupid woman," thought Cordelia, and looking far into the future, to that day when she would live with her brother and his wife. No doubt Amaza would wish to be relieved of the housekeeping.

"I said to Amaza," remarked Humphrey through a pause, "that she must make it up with her stepmother."

It already rather bothered him that he could not shorten that odd name, Amaza; clip it into something lover-like and idiotic. When you were engaged you

ought to call your girl Tubby or Bunny or something like that.

"Make it up!" Cordelia looked at Amaza in a sisterly way. "What an odd way of putting it. But we will go over and see them soon. I heard from Rose last week. They are staying with Lady Leith. It is only ten miles, or less, from here We could drive. We could hire a motor from the garage in the market town. By the way, Marcia, do you know that one of Lady Leith's sons has got this living? The Vicar is too old and has retired at last."

"Time too," said Humphrey. "He hasn't got a tooth in his head, and he won't buy false ones."

"The Reverend Cyril Leith!" Marcia shook off her sullen mood. "Who told you?"

"The postmistress," returned Cordelia. "She naturally knows everything, and she'd just sent a telegram off to the Vicarage when I dropped in to have a parcel weighed."

"He took the special services through Lent," Marcia said, "and on Ash Wednesday Lady Leith was at the church. She stayed at the Vicarage for a night or two. I quite well remember her handsome carriage and pair. And I remember that dear Herbert wouldn't go to Commination that day with me. He had very definite views in religion and didn't believe in damning your neighbour."

"Ash Wednesday." Amaza had learnt a little; from Sebastien in the past, from regular church attendance in the present. "That's what you call a day of penitence, isn't it? Then why did she want a carriage and pair? The Lord Jesus rode upon a donkey."

"That was on Palm Sunday," said Marcia severely. "You don't understand the Church's seasons, dear. How should you?"

She went on talking in a rather pointed way about the Reverend Cyril Leith and his wonderful eloquence, which she had not forgotten, nor ever could forget.

"Well, we shall see the chap when we go over to Mrs. Meeks's," said Humphrey hopefully.

He was rather flushed and savage; she had snubbed Amaza and it wasn't the first time.

Cordelia was clever, and she said at once—

"You must come too, Marcia. Why can't we make it Monday?"

The visit would be less marked, less awkward for Amaza and her stepmother, if Marcia went. One would just send a wire half-and-hour before to say that the party might be expected. That would be best.

"I can't go on Monday," said Marcia.

"What a pity," Cordelia looked at her brother, "Humphrey can't go on any other day."

"Yes, I can; any day," he returned quickly. "Price can look after things. Would Wednesday do?" He spoke to Marcia. "I'm fixed up for Tuesday."

"Wednesday would do nicely," she said, and returned his look defiantly.

Price was the managing man of the House, and now-a-days he looked after most things. Cordelia hated Price. If only she were a man! Cordelia was one of those women who owe their parents a grudge for their sex.

"Well, then, Wednesday." She nodded comprehensively. "If you're quite sure you won't be wanted by the House, Humphrey?"

"Shouldn't say so if I was, should I?" he returned.

So it was settled. They would hire a motor, send a wire, get over in time for lunch. It never occurred to any one to ask Amaza which day suited her best.

She did not dread this Wednesday meeting with her stepmother. She dreaded nothing now. She clung in thought to Humphrey all the time.

Her attitude towards him was perfect; it was just what he desired. She was docile and receptive. If now and then he felt that sense of hunger and of cheating, it was simply the result of his wild life. He wasn't fit yet to breath the air with angels. That was it.

He repeatedly recurred, in those days between Saturday and Wednesday, to his silly little sins. Amaza would say—

"Dear Humphrey, don't remember them any more. Don't talk about them. That is best. Then they will die." Her face flushed and her eyes sparkled. "By

and by you will be able to say, 'it wasn't me, it wasn't me at all,'" she concluded, sounding a trumpet note of silver joy.

"What wasn't me at all?"

"The young man who did the all sorts of things. The things you've said."

"I hate them so and I hate myself. I should have gone to the devil if I hadn't met you," he said, and spoke proudly.

He was very sorry; yet it was a credit to his manliness that these exuberances had been.

He only went up to London for two or three hours on Tuesday, for a Board meeting. All the rest of the time he hung about Amaza, who looked white and quiet and loving. She said very little, she smiled all the time. She listened while he talked, she let him kiss her. Sometimes it was her lips—as an equal—and sometimes, humbly, he kissed her hands and called her a saint. She did not contradict him. But she was very glad when Wednesday came and she looked anxiously down into the garden at dawn to see if the day meant to be fine. It would be very nice to have any sort of change.

"We must have a regular business confab with your stepmother," Humphrey had said several times. "There is no reason why we should wait, is there, my pet? Let's get spliced at once."

"Yes, at once," returned Amaza docilely.

"And how about money?" Humphrey pursued (Cordelia had urged him to this). "Are you sure you've only got two hundred a year? You don't think the old girl's keeping any back? She's quite equal to it. We must find out. We'll have everything ship-shape."

Wednesday was shining and clear; a rollicking day of rather strident laughter. They arrived at Lady Leith's without mishap. Amaza was cool; the other three were in high spirits. Even Marcia shook off the sulks which Humphrey's engagement had provoked.

Amaza had enlarged on Cordelia's wire and written beforehand to her stepmother direct. It had been a very easy letter to write. Everything was easy now. She was calm and safe. One had Humphrey to thank for that,

and it must never be forgotten. She told herself that she could never be grateful enough, nor enduring enough. In quite a little while you would get used to him.

Mrs. Meeks had hardly changed; there was rather more of her and that was all. There was rather less of Rose and Violet. Lady Leith to most people was simply one of those torpid, richly-dressed matrons who do not count. To Amaza, she was a violent shock; for she remembered that she had been thin and active; that she had "kept her figure," that she had spoken most eloquently on behalf of the British Women's Temperance Society. The sparse body of your imagination was deeply imbedded in the soft flesh which presented itself to you now. Amaza stared, as her hand dropped into the cushiony warmth of Lady Leith's.

Mrs. Meeks, observant (she did not mean to miss a minute of this dramatic day), said plainly with her eyes to her stepdaughter, "I will explain presently."

When she did, Amaza learned that Lady Leith's activities, at drawing-room meetings and out in the open, had been of the briefest. She was naturally a lethargic woman, and she took fright for her figure at forty odd, as women do. When after some preliminary warding off she found herself steadily growing fatter, in spite of all that she did and all that she didn't eat—she sweetly let Nature take its natural course: and Nature revenged herself for all the previous thwarting! Lady Leith had no daughters to marry off her hands, nor did she in the least wish to make a second marriage herself. Therefore—why?

She took to eating and drinking; to fat cushions and silence. She was always smiling and always ready for her nicely cooked meals. She was born for lethargy and nobly fulfilled her destiny. "She is positively unwieldy, my dear," Mrs. Meeks said in conclusion to Amaza.

She smiled as she said it; for the fatter her friend got the thinner her own distinctly spreading figure showed by contrast.

Lunch was ready. They all settled into their places and the game began. Mrs. Meeks was quite excited;

she meant to find out where Amaza had been all this time. Amaza was composed; for her heart was indifferent and withdrawn from them all. She had picked up poor Humphrey to play his important, most necessary part in her redemption; nothing else. Yet she was softly unconscious of being either unfeeling or double-faced. Lady Leith, a warm-natured woman, was silently taken with her. She watched her manner to her stepsisters. She was sweet and they were dry. Sometimes Lady Leith wearied of the athletic Langfields, and she did not mean her sons to marry them. For this reason—she could be wily as a mother; the fattest and the sleepiest women can—she had them staying in the house. And she had the satisfaction of knowing that both Cyril and James were quite disenchanted.

James was lunching out to-day, but Cyril appeared and proved himself an astounding trencher man.

"After lunch," Mrs. Meeks beamed at her stepdaughter, "you and I will walk across the heath together. I must show you the house we are building, the girls and I."

"Take me too," pleaded Humphrey, with his mouth full; this was the best lunch he'd tasted for a long time and it was plain the Reverend Cyril thought so too.

This fat Lady Leith reminded Humphrey of his own mother. Sentimentally, he took everything that was offered him and felt a good little boy.

"No. We can't have you. We'd like to be alone." Mrs. Meeks indulged in her rare and rather petrifying air of archness. "I've not seen Amaza for such a long time. It's really quite an age, but"—she now impressively addressed the whole company—"her health had to be considered first, and the doctor absolutely forbade London for another hour. I think health is so often responsible for the breaking up of families."

Everybody listened to her and nobody believed a word. But this did not matter.

"And now"—Mrs. Meeks beamed at Amaza—"you are looking so extremely well. Isn't she, Rose? Don't you think so, Violet?"

The Langfields, who wore green knitted jerseys,

because they were going out to golf in a minute or two, returned, docilely and together—

"Extremely well, mamma."

They smiled at Amaza in the dear old frozen, superior way.

"I see you are wearing colours. Don't you remember, darling, that I used to dress you in black? It suited you, but so does that red frock. It is just the right shade for your hair," purred Mrs. Meeks, who was consistently voluble on this occasion.

"Such pretty hair!" said Lady Leith.

It was almost the first thing she had said at her own table, and she beamed deliciously at Amaza, who was instantly seized with that wild desire to cry, which always took her when people were extra tender and when it was real.

Coming along in the motor, Marcia and Cordelia had privately agreed that red was an idiotic choice for a red-haired woman. But they were converted to it now, for no one, looking at Mrs. Meeks, could doubt her taste in dress. Though still handsome and invincibly elegant, she had grown fatter. Yet she remained a woman who would lend an air to her very shroud, when the time came.

"You haven't sent to Simone for your things since you left London, I suppose?" she asked, and summing up Amaza's red frock, which was just the one shade possible for her and looked ravishing with her red hair. What natural taste the girl had! That had been one of the unspoken links between them, thought the stepmother. She concluded—

"And you've gone out of black. Well, of course, it is high time, but black suited you admirably."

"No, not to Simone." Amaza looked suddenly wan. It was the look Marcia always distrusted, and she broke in now, speaking hard, as a lapidary cuts stones—

"I've never seen Amaza wear so much as a black ribbon. I've often wondered why."

"I went about all over the place for my things," Amaza continued, looking at her stepmother and speaking hurriedly; for she suddenly felt that forks were lifted and eyes fixed. "Some of them were ready made.

And as for black," she shivered, they all saw it, "I hate it now."

"Ready made! Naughty girl." Mrs. Meeks lifted her hands and left off eating. "After all my careful training."

She spoke with a sort of waggish hastiness and she rattled on about Simone and her skill; insisting to Lady Leith that she really must give this treasure a trial.

Humphrey was thinking, "Sly old fox! She gets a commission, I'll bet."

When the meal was over, Amaza, her stepmother and the Langfields started off; Rose and Violet for the golf-links, the others to look at the new house that was building.

"The Russell Square house," Mrs. Meeks explained, "is in the agent's hands. He assures me he can dispose of the lease easily. Bloomsbury is quite the fashion. Your dear father left me a free hand in the matter, and the girls and I have quite decided not to live in London again. We got sick to death of drawing-room meetings and collecting boxes and that kind of thing. Cordelia keeps on with it all, so I understand."

She spoke with some venom; for these energies had provoked nothing. Violet and Rose were still unattached.

"Is the house empty?" asked Amaza, looking horribly sad; for the love of that house was bound up with her.

"Dear me, no. Mrs. Huckson is in it, of all people, with her sister to keep her company and a girl to clean up the place. I thought it an excellent plan. She was glad to come for nothing. Huckson is dead, you know, and she had to give up the Jermyn Street place. It was only for gentlemen, and Huckson used to valet them. I wonder that he never cut their throats and provoked some awful scandal, for he was generally half tipsy. If I were a man no chin of mine would ever have been under *his* razor."

They walked on, Violet and Rose went a little in front, eager to begin their game. Amaza was full of a helpless, fatalistic feeling. It was an odd feeling and

therefore to be faintly welcomed as a return to innocence. Her stepmother and the Langfields had always provoked it, because they were so dull. She feared now lest they should revive her past and destroy her future. Mrs. Meeks was a woman of finesse, and could always be relied upon to rush into the breach and save a social situation. But each effort left her exhausted. She had brought Simone to the rescue to-day at lunch, she had recovered Amaza's confusion (not lost upon her, by any means) with an unbroken cackle of frills and cut and style. She had complimented Marcia and rallied Cordelia, whose taste in dress was notorious. She had now retired into the ditches of a well-earned silence. She smacked her lips now and then. This was a trick she had. No other sound came from them for several minutes.

They all four clumped on. How thick the Langfields' boots were, and weren't short skirts bound with leather frightful! Amaza was regarding all this and, at the same time, trying like mad to think of something she might say. Anything to break this stolid, brisk-stepping silence. But the very presence of the dull woman dries your tongue at its very roots. She could think of nothing. She was dying to take to her heels and run away. For they might snatch from her, these three cheerful thick women, the rose of joy which was just unfolding. She held it in her hand; the symbolic, sweet-smelling flower which Humphrey had given.

But it was safe, so far. It was to open later, so widely, so beautifully. It would tremble, mature, and be a marvel in her hand; before the petals fell and scattered. None of this she knew, not yet.

Violet and Rose at last made a diversion by saying good-bye. They shook hands, they smiled widely, showing excellent square teeth. Their broad pasty faces were friendly and cold: nothing ever destroyed their expression of weak well-meaning.

"We shan't see you again," they said, showing neither relief nor regret. "Don't expect us back till dinner-time, mamma. Tell Lady Leith."

Mrs. Meeks stood still to watch them skirt the putting-green. She wore a manner of affectionate irritation, for

it must be admitted that Violet and Rose had made no progress whatever with Cyril and James Leith.

"You see, my dear," she said, walking on, "that they haven't got engaged. I don't think girls do now-a-days, as a rule, unless it is to some one they have known all their lives. You must have been about eight when you played about with Humphrey Mallard in the Gardens."

"You mean that they can't marry unless they meet a man. Of course not," agreed Amaza amiably.

Her stepmother wore a tufted kind of frock. When she walked she looked like a rolling barrel stuck with spikes.

Awkwardness distilled itself between the two. Amaza hardly felt it; she was merely bored to death, just as usual. Her stepmother and the Langfields, so she considered, played a very small part in the scheme of her future life.

But Mrs. Meeks could not forget that last stormy interview in the Russell Square house, and although she had treated her conscience to a course of narcotics ever since, it had never properly slept. Yet here was Amaza turning up, not like a bad penny, but as a golden guinea new from the mint. She was happy and well and charmingly dressed. This young widowed Mrs. Pettigrew with whom she was living seemed irreproachable. Finally, she was engaged to a most eligible young man; for the Mallards were made of money. Every one knew that. The girl had more brains than one had given her credit for. Yet the ugliness of the Sir Walter Wintle episode remained for Mrs. Meeks.

"I think," she said at last, "that I was a little hasty that day, Amaza. I reproached myself afterwards, and I heard of you through the lawyer, of course. You had to correspond with him over your income. Otherwise I should have taken prompt steps to—to recover you."

She stopped and stared at the impassive face. Amaza's lips moved impassively too, and said—

"Recover me! I wasn't a cheque that you didn't want cashed—or a bag at the cloak-room, or—or—anything like that."

"Don't be absurd, my dear. That is your old way of

taking things, and it made more unpleasantness between us than anything else. There is a time for everything, and such jests—I suppose you call them jests—are quite out of place."

The stepmother was sorry. She was also pleased. Amaza had managed things so nicely. Yet it would take very little to make her quarrel with the girl, and more violently than ever before.

"I kept my eye on you," she said, with a forced laugh, determined to remain good tempered.

"I know you did, and from a long way off. You don't seem to squint, either."

Amaza looked sadly into the twinkling eyes. They were just brightly polished glass.

"Squint!"

"I wriggled about all sorts of ways, and your eye was on me all the time. But we won't talk about it any more, please."

"How sensible you've grown, dear girl! Least said, soonest mended."

They went on walking. The pall of dulness fell again. Amaza was violently trying to kick herself loose of its envelopment. Yet she couldn't think of one suitable word to say.

"I suppose you've been acting as a companion all the time?" asked Mrs. Meeks.

"All the time," returned Amaza, looking hard at the sky.

"Well, well,"—the stepmother clicked her tongue—"here we are at my little home." Mrs. Meeks stopped dead at a sandy track which was to be a gravel drive some day. "Shall we go on? There is very little to see, for they have only just laid the foundations. But the pergola is there, and the rambler roses are getting on quite nicely. We've made a rockery too, and wired it all round and over to keep the rabbits off. It is such an exposed situation, so high and healthy, that the wind tears up most things by the roots. We shall have trouble with the garden, I expect. But we shall be right on the golf-links. Think what that means to the girls!"

She looked across the links wistfully, and Amaza felt

suddenly sorry for her and fond of her, almost for the first time. Mrs. Meeks was thinking bitterly, "What are golf-sticks and balls compared to a husband and a nice little family!"

"I wonder," she looked keen, for she had a sound business inspiration and it kicked aside sentiment, "if you and Humphrey would care to take the Russell Square house off my hands? He wants to live in London when he's married. Cordelia told me so, just now. What a fright Cordelia is, by the way. I never in my life saw such a coat and skirt. You could buy the lease outright, or you could have the place on a seven years' agreement."

Amaza stood transfixed. The warm south-west wind, so strong up here, blew her red hair about and gave her a manner of wildness: yet this was nothing to the passionate glad tempest inside. Her heart was beating fast, her head whirled. She stood in a mist of waving rose label, scaffold-poles and piled together clinkers; in this place destined for a house and garden. It was naked and dry and hard; fine dust blew across it all the time, a golden, gritty shower.

She stared at her stepmother's large, plum-coloured face.

"Go back to Russell Square! That would be too wonderful, too good to be true."

"Nonsense!" Mrs. Meeks spoke briskly and looked round with some apprehension: for Humphrey might have followed them; she knew the ways of infatuated young men. "Wipe your eyes, Amaza, and don't be a baby."

In just that voice, long ago, she had said peremptorily—

"Put your hair back out of your eyes, Amaza," or, "Don't stand upon one leg looking so foolish, Amaza, my dear."

Amaza now obediently wiped her eyes and looked penitent.

Her stepmother took her arm and walked her briskly about, round the scaffold-poles of the new house. There was a bit of a nip in her fingers; they might have been

a lobster's claw. That much of her feelings she might with safety express.

"Step out, my dear; take a long breath. The air is so good if one is a little hysterical," she said. "I don't wonder at your being moved. I am too."

"Yes, but please don't let feeling take the form of bruising my arm."

Mrs. Meeks let go. Her mouth looked spiteful, yet she meant to keep it shut.

"I understand your emotion, of course, Amaza, but other people might not. Take my advice and never let your heart get the better of you before a husband. That's been my motto, and"—she gave her jolly, hard laugh—"it's carried me over some very nasty places, I can assure you."

The laugh said lots of things.

Amaza retreated, with a manner of reminiscent horror, then, going closer and speaking humbly, she said—

"You are very kind, you mean to be kind, and I am grateful. But it comes too late; that is all."

She seemed dreadfully tired.

"Do you remember," the weary voice went on, "when Violet had a birthday and they sent the sugar cake too late for tea? It looked so beautiful. We couldn't eat a bit; there had been buns before. Wally Mallard cried when he saw the pink icing. Well, that's your kindness. It's too late. There have been buns before!"

She gave her ringing, merry laugh.

"Rubbish and stuff! There will be cake when you are married to Humphrey," said Mrs. Meeks, with rare readiness. "I shall certainly speak to Humphrey about the Russell Square house directly we get back. And we ought to be getting back now; Lady Leith likes tea at four."

"So does Marcia," said Amaza, moving stiffly.

"She is so hospitable. I wouldn't put her out even in the smallest matter for worlds. She is only too delighted for us to stay on with her until our own house is ready. Don't you call that generous?

"We could, of course, go back to Russell Square, but the girls love a country life. I go up myself now and then for a week or so, to shop and so forth. Mrs.

Huckson looks after me. The furniture is all there. When we settle, I shall bring some down here and sell the rest."

"Humphrey might care to buy some," said Amaza, speaking breathlessly and recalling the solid old tables and chairs.

"That is an excellent idea." Mrs. Meeks immediately started ready-reckoning. "And here he is coming across to meet us. I knew he would." She laughed again; the laugh that Amaza interpreted, dreaded and stepped back from.

Humphrey had been wretched. No one took any notice of him, until a terrier came in and leapt upon him and let him twist its ears.

"That is my son James's dog," Lady Leith had said, smiling sleepily to Cordelia, "he will be in soon, I expect."

The Reverend Cyril meanwhile was sitting apart with Marcia and feeling that he had seldom met a woman so intelligent as Mrs. Pettigrew. What a grip such a woman would keep upon parochial affairs! He was going to take up his first living at Grainingfold in October.

"It was as dull as ditch-water indoors," Humphrey said apologetically to Mrs. Meeks, and devouring Amaza with his candid eyes.

Amaza, who had recovered her sense of safety at the very sight of him, was thinking gaily, "it was a more sparkling ditch than the one I've been sitting in, anyway."

She let Humphrey hold her hand. The stepmother was suddenly as blind as a bat, and when she stooped down to prod at a pigmy plant which would one day, let us hope, help to clothe the rockery, Humphrey kissed his betrothed out here in the wind-swept open: with little flags flying about out there on the links; with straight-fronted young women in shirt waists playing savagely.

Amaza clung to him.

"Has she said anything to upset you?" he whispered fiercely and glowering at the stepmother's fashionable, tuft-sown back.

"Not a word. She has been most kind."

"Well, let's trot back to tea," he said, looking hungry at once. "You ready, Mrs. Meeks?"

"Quite, my dear boy. I just wanted to give a last look at these little purple aubretias."

They returned to the road.

"Mind those drain-pipes," said Humphrey, pulling Amaza to him. He didn't bother about Mrs. Meeks. They were her confounded drain-pipes, and if she liked to break her neck she might. He never cared a jot what happened to any one, except those he was fond of. And he could only remain fond of a person so long as that person treated him decently.

This rule would apply with equal force to his wife.

"The second chap came in soon after you left. I never was over fond of parsons," he admitted ingenuously. "They put a spoke in your wheel. If I went in for religion, started in to win, I should go to the little shop in Bloomsbury. You know, Mrs. Meeks."

"Do you mean the place off Tavistock Square? That man is a Unitarian."

She spoke coldly; for she was orthodox and never forgot that the late Langfield had carried round the alms-bag at a fashionable church where the music was florid.

"Very likely. But he's got the gift of the gab, and that's all you want. The place is crowded. I went once. You can drop in as you would to a theatre; evening dress, you know."

"I shouldn't like that at all," said Mrs. Meeks, and looking at Amaza, who said nothing, and over whose face had fallen the old irritating vacant look one knew so well. Yet she could be trusted not to make a fool of herself when it came to a husband. This was already clear.

"His name's James, isn't it?" asked Humphrey, reverting to Lady Leith's second clerical son. "He talked to Cordy; first time I've ever seen any one take much interest in the old girl. She'll be lecturing him before long. The other one, Cyril, got very thick with Marcia. She was going it like a mill-clack when I left. Lady Leith dropped off on the sofa."

Humphrey was painting a vivid picture of the party in his way; colours a little primary, perhaps.

"She always sleeps after lunch," explained Mrs. Meeks.

"Quite right, too. It's safer for that sort of complexion. My mother did. I say, what a head that Cyril's got. It's enormous. And how he eats! His mother said to me, just before she went to sleep, 'Cyril is a great meat eater. You may have noticed. He needs it to keep up his strength.' Yet all but his head, he's as thin as a lath."

"The meat goes to his head," said Amaza carelessly, and half turning hers towards her betrothed and her stepmother.

Mrs. Meeks did not propose that Amaza should waste time by this kind of disgusting idiocy. She plunged at once into the matter of the Russell Square house, pointing out to Humphrey that here was a chance in ten thousand. To her delight he, as he said, "cottoned" to the idea at once, and long before they got back to Lady Leith's the matter was settled, save that he made the proviso of "seeing what Cordy said" before he gave his absolute word. For he was afraid of Mrs. Meeks, who might nail him down without his knowledge, and he was fond of his sister, for all their fights. Also, he was afraid of her.

He said he could do with some of the furniture too. Amaza must say what she most wanted.

"We'll go up and look over the place. You wouldn't mind, I suppose?" he asked Mrs. Meeks, and speaking with a new note of good-natured and quite unconscious insolence. This was the way he always spoke to people when they were prepared to take his money in exchange for something else.

It was the attitude of buyer and seller which common minds never can get away from, whatever the circumstances may be.

"Of course not, my dear boy, go whenever you like," said the stepmother genially.

She added, speaking rather nervously to Amaza, who kept so remarkably quiet—

"Why shouldn't you and I go up and stay there for a bit, just in the old way? My girls wouldn't mind being left. So long as they have golf, they miss nothing and no one. We could look at the shops and think about a trousseau for you."

She bridled and simpered. Next to choosing a trousseau for herself (to which effort she was yet equal) or to choosing one for her own girls (which was a hopeless ideal) she would choose one for her stepdaughter.

"No," said Amaza steadily, and looking at Humphrey, "I do not wish to see the house again, until I am your wife and can be its mistress. That will be so much more beautiful. As to my clothes, I can get them through the post."

Her subdued voice, her solemn eyes, aroused in him the new scared sense of reverence. He felt that here was an angel, and that he would wash himself white and prove himself worthy.

"All right. You always know best," he returned tenderly. "I'll go and poke about the place by myself."

Mrs. Meeks, with some temper, gave him permission to poke about how and whenever he liked.

As to a girl getting a trousseau through the post, this annoyed her more than anything Amaza had done to-day. And it was most extraordinary; since Amaza had a natural passion for pretty things.

"I wash my hands of you," she said, with her air of dangerous archness.

Her stepdaughter answered, with all the exasperating sweet insolence of the childish days—

"But why wash one's hands twice?"

A look, of sharpened weapons, flashed between the two: blades touched under Humphrey's very nose. He was looking at the links.

"I believe," he said, grinning pleasantly, "that I should become a regular dab at golf, once I took it up."

Mrs. Meeks saw her stepdaughter once more for a moment alone before the motor started back for Grainingfold.

"Come up to my room and tie on your veil," she

said, with an imperiously affectionate hand on Amaza's hip, at the last.

They went up the stairs and into the luxurious room together. Mrs. Meeks shut the door and brimmed over on a cane-seated chair too small. She spread her knees and caught her hands round them. The old gesture, yet more of it!

Amaza, looking at the shut door, felt a captive and turned faint of soul. She would be very glad when this day was over. Her stepmother's smile—a new smile; impudently friendly, a knowing smile—frightened her. She thought she understood why murders were committed. You must clear your way as you went. This, for the present, was her philosophy.

"We don't seem to have had a minute to ourselves," said Mrs. Meeks, her twinkling eyes watching with approval the deft fingers. "What a difference there is in the way of tying a veil! You have just the trick. I always had. We must talk over your marriage. Nothing is settled yet, of course. But you won't have a long engagement, I suppose."

"We are going to get married just as soon as ever we can," returned Amaza, pulling out the chiffon bows beneath her chin and speaking with what, in a prospective bride, you could only call flagrant immodesty. "It is no one's business but our own." She smiled slowly.

"I suppose not." Mrs. Meeks spread her knees, her eyes travelled up and down; from Amaza's hat to Amaza's shoe. "You are turned twenty-two. One is apt to forget that."

"I am nearly twenty-three, dear. It is natural you should forget. Humphrey wishes to be married in October. I am ready now. Shall we go down-stairs? The others will be waiting."

She went towards the door, and although she knew it wasn't locked, her desperate manner said, "Don't shut me in. Let me fly loose and find my own nest."

"You are looking very well. You have grown uncommonly handsome," said Mrs. Meeks, rising slowly, for she was fat. She spoke thoughtfully and wide of the mark.

There were lots of things she didn't understand and never would.

Amaza just now, outside the new house on the heath, had looked so worn. You might have said haggard; you remembered that her mother was delicate and died young. Amaza here, standing up so straight and slim and strong, looked radiant when she said, "Humphrey wishes to be married in October!" Could one believe that it was the same girl?

Mrs. Meeks knew, no one better, that Amaza's body, though shaken all her life through by every mood, was never torn up. Call her a tree and say that her roots were deep: and all the more steady because her branches swayed beneath the breath of each wind!

The stepmother was never likely to make the mistake which Marcia had made, of believing Amaza to be consumptive. She had weathered the child through mild attacks of chicken pox and early fevers. She remembered how delicate her own girls always were; with winter colds and coughs and chronic delicacies left behind each childish disorder. Amaza, as a child, had been as hard as iron.

She wasn't, as a woman, going to die or develop hysteria or betray the secret of her past. With all her silly tricks of speech, she was no fool.

"I was the fool," reflected Mrs. Meeks, as she preceded her stepdaughter down-stairs, "ever to think so. That girl could carry any mortal thing through."

She asked herself irately, where was the good of girls playing games, if they couldn't play the one game?

She was snappish with Violet and Rose that night. She flung Amaza and her rich young man in their teeth. But they were tired to death with tearing about in the dust all day and hardly listened to a word she said.

The motor went off, also in dust; the whole day had been dust and shine. It was a hard day. They all agreed, shouting genially to each other at parting, that the weather had been perfect.

Farewells were warm. It was settled that Mrs. Pettigrew should entertain Mrs. Meeks and her daughters

and Lady Leith's two sons early next week. Lady Leith was too bulky to be moved. Like heavy furniture, she kept close to the wall.

"It will be a big party," said Marcia to Cordelia, as they rushed down the hill. "I hope it will be fine. Then we can have lunch in the garden. My dining-room is small."

"It is sure to be lovely," returned Cordelia, quite gushingly.

She and Marcia were looking unusually nice; happy and pink. Humphrey was happy too. He roared with laughter when the chauffeur ran over a hen in the road.

CHAPTER X

THE TASTE OF TAMARINDS

"HAVE you had a nice day, darling?" Humphrey asked, coming into the drawing-room. He always asked the same question and with the same careless pet-name tag to it.

He kissed his wife with appetite; as if she were a first course. When he came home from the City each day he retired at once to his dressing-room and came down nice and pink and clean all ready for dinner. Humphrey never lost a certain agreeable alloy of boyishness, and each dress suit looked as if it were his first.

"All the days are nice," Amaza returned; speaking quietly, yet from a full heart.

For life, at last, was joyous and every day flowed softly, as a stream—a stream with some veiled sun upon it: one would not continue the likeness and say that, at evening time, when Humphrey came home, ardent and clamouring for his dinner, then the sun had set!

She was a wife, honoured, adored and in her old home. Hardly anything had changed. Humphrey had bought a great deal of her father's furniture. In the houses all round, old friends were still living; people who had known her as a child, who had even been friends with her real mother. It was extraordinary—the way you circled round and picked up the same things and the same people.

Amaza loved it and was grateful. Her sense of thanksgiving brimmed over sometimes. She was never bored for a moment, never restless or inquiring or unhappy. One no longer looked up into trees, down into puddles and along the seams of pavements. Hers, she assured herself, was the usual fairy tale. She had married early and was living happy ever after.

Glancing back at her life, wasn't the past just a nightmare? And, in the way of nightmares, weren't you surpassingly glad when you quite woke up and found that not a bit of it was true? It had taken her a long time to wake up; the worse the nightmare, the more drawn out the waking.

She used to shop, to pay long visits to Simone, to read novels; just in the old way. Sometimes she would go out to a dinner-party with Humphrey, and sometimes they would give a little dinner-party themselves —but that had not been just lately and would not be again just yet. She loved playing hostess. The slow, elegant solidity of these affairs enchanted her. People in Bloomsbury had not changed very much; changes were beyond; in traffic and architecture. It took her some time to get used to several things of this sort, and it invariably saddened her to pass through Cosmo Place. On the south side in her childhood there had been a jolly little row of shops; a fruit shop was one and a sweet-stuff shop the other. These were gone, and in their place stood a vindictive dead wall.

Take it altogether, her sole anxiety now was lest Humphrey should get knocked down by something in the fog as he dashed about the City. There had been several fogs lately, and he had a dangerous trick of ducking under horses' heads and darting in front of motors.

With regard to Humphrey, if he never stirred her, he no longer repelled. She dropped readily into the habit of taking him as all in the day's work, and yet as a person completely away from and outside her secret abstract joys. For there were always a thousand things that could make her completely happy; just dusks and little clouds; suggested perfumes and the great branches of those trees in the Gardens outside.

Once more she walked in the Gardens of an afternoon, and more than once it had been with Mrs. Huckson, who had taken a boarding-house in Woburn Place close by.

"You send for me at any hour of the night or day, my lamb," she said affectionately, "and I'll be with you in five minutes."

Amaza flushed. It was miraculous; the joy that was coming. Every breath she drew was expectant and hushed.

"I shall send for you." She looked solemn. "And your hat isn't quite straight."

It never was; for Mrs. Huckson would persist in wearing fashionable hats, and her hairdressing wasn't equal to it. In her dress and manner she showed traces of that rejuvenation granted to widows; one had noticed the same thing in Marcia. It really seemed that men, as a sex, sat hard upon your spirits.

"You don't find it dull?" asked Humphrey, kissing her again.

"Dull, no, never. Do you?"

"I! Not a bit. But I might if I was at home all day." He stared round the handsome, sombre room. "Why the dickens don't they serve the dinner? What grub have you got, Amaza? I'm so hungry."

"You always are." She smiled at him. "There are lots of things to eat. The cook knows, and you'll see. Turvey is coming up now. Let go of my hand."

She had petitioned that their man-servant should be called Turvey for all time, and Humphrey had granted that he might be called any mortal name she liked, so long as he valeted well.

He was fond of her and proud. He teased her continually with clumsy, school-boy caresses.

They went down. He gobbled his dinner engagingly. To enjoy his meals and brag of his good appetite was in his blood. And, like most greedy people, he resented those of lesser appetites. Table asceticism, for Humphrey, was only permissible on a desert isle or in a besieged city; some place, that is, where you were put perforce upon rations: and directly you had the luck to get off—or out—you would go and have a good feed at once, to make up arrears.

It blunted the edge of his desires to see Amaza toy with some dishes and miss most. Already, although he hardly knew it, he was tired of her in certain aspects. For he liked what he called a jolly woman; and he met several about; wives of business men, and so forth.

They laughed at what you said and weren't squeamish. Just now, he occasionally went out to dinner alone, for Amaza couldn't. He hoped that, later on, she also would be more jolly and appreciate a broad joke. For it cut his laughter clean in halves to see, through the burst of a guffaw, her faintly puzzled and delicately disdainful face.

There was an implied purity about her which he resented. She wouldn't go to theatres or music-halls; but went to bed at ten. "It's the way I was brought up," she used to say, putting her arms round his neck when he looked sulky at refusal; "let me keep to it." But you might as well be married to a nun out of uniform, he sulkily thought.

When one was engaged, everything of that sort was all very well, and he had adored her for it. Yet even through the engagement he had been uncomfortable sometimes, and his spirit had felt as his body would have done had he worn things too tight. When a man married, things were altogether different. He was one of those who drew a very clear line of demarcation, and he hardly considered that married reserves were respectable.

He watched her pecking at her dinner; just as he had watched her a hundred times before, at their own table and at other people's. It had been all very well for her to feed upon fruit and milky stuff when one thought she was a saint and a fairy. He wished that, as his wife, she would eat made dishes and drink wine; as other women. Otherwise, wasn't it just a little underbred and cranky?

Everything would be different later on. He buoyed himself up with this. For the present, she kept him on his best behaviour and he hated it. Yet she must be indulged. When you were engaged, that was quite another story. When you were married you—you spread yourself, so to speak. She gave him the constant sense of curbing. He felt as he did when he went into a church, a picture gallery or museum: in short, some place where you were expected to be devilish clever or deuced devout.

"What have you been up to all the time? I like her pastry," he said. "Aren't you having any?"

"No, thank you. Oh, I went to Simone. She sent me a card for her autumn show. I didn't buy anything. Coming home, I told him to drop me at Alice Griffins'. But the hall porter said she had gone away. No one seems to know where, and the odd thing is that you never see her name in the papers now."

"People like that," philosophized Humphrey, "are queer fish. All theatricals are; singers and musicians and parties of that sort. They get married and go into the Divorce Court, or"—he grinned at the piquant memory of the tea-shop girl—"they sue a man for breach."

"But she wasn't married. My stepmother saw her not long ago."

"Well," returned Humphrey jovially, "perhaps she wishes she was."

And again he was nettled because Amaza did not laugh at this innocent joke.

He was one of those of whom it is said "they must have their joke": it comes hard on those others, with a sense of humour, to be asked to laugh. That is all.

"Then I came home," said Amaza, "and sat looking out at the Gardens until it was dark."

"You didn't see Cordy? Were you out when she called?"

"I wasn't told she had called."

"Perhaps she didn't. She was rather in a rush. She came to me in the City on what"—he looked savage—"she called an important matter. Women make a mistake when they stick their noses into business. Cordy thinks she's got a voice in the management of the House."

He, with dead Wally and with the very much alive and far too vigilant Cordelia, spoke of the House with a capital letter. In his case it was just tradition and instinctive mimicry; in theirs, it was a true British pride in commerce.

"She promised me she'd look you up if she could," he said, recovering, as Turvey stood at his elbow with the cheese he loved best of all cheeses. "But she didn't sound likely. She had lots of things to do, and she was to meet Marcia in Piccadilly at three."

"They are shopping, of course." Amaza smiled and looked faintly scornful; for one might imagine what a hotch-potch of colour and fashioning Cordelia's trousseau would be! "The wedding is next Wednesday, isn't it?"

"Yes, and she's sorry you can't go. She feels aggrieved, although she knows you can't help it. You went to Marcia's."

"That was months ago," Amaza gravely reminded him.

Humphrey chuckled.

"Yes," he said simply, "it was a neck-to-neck race, but the widow won. I'd always back a widow."

"Is my stepmother going to the wedding?" asked Amaza. "I wonder what she'll wear!"

"Rather, and the Langfield girls. A bitter pill for them to swallow! She meant Cyril for Violet and James for Rose, or t'other way round. Marcia and Cordy just walked over the course."

Humphrey looked enormously tickled. When he saw Amaza's face—just patient, indulgent merriment and nothing more—he scowled.

When they got up-stairs again he complained—

"I wish you had more fun."

Then, certainly sulky, for he was nothing but an overgrown boy all the time, and you never noticed his tantrums, he took up the evening paper.

Amaza sat smiling in her chair, listening to the rumble of traffic in the streets beyond the Square, listening to the tiny wind in the trees. She was at peace; for her soul had the happy trick of getting clean away from Humphrey directly he left off speaking. This is the attitude of many wives and some husbands; the little jaunts into Freedom keep them alive.

"By Jove!" he said, after a time, and rustling the pink sheets. "Lord Lanark's got an heir. What a brilliant chap he is, that little Lanark! I heard him speak lots of times before the last election. You know the name, don't you, Amaza? Surely you follow politics?"

She was looking very stupid. Deuce take it, what did she follow or take an interest in?

"I know the name." She nodded and smiled at him

in a slow appealing way. It was the way that strangely touched him.

"Don't you feel well?" he asked, and instantly went over to her and trifled with the red hair on her brow.

"Yes, quite well, dear Humphrey. How good you are to watch me so closely and to care. Go back to your chair and read more bits about Lord Lanark."

She regarded him with yearning and terror as he picked the paper up. Sir Walter Wintle had read from a paper too and on that other day in the flat. A Lanark had died then; now a Lanark was born. Did you keep just going round in a circle? Was that Life?

The stupid look was still upon her; the look of trying so bitterly not to remember. Humphrey recalled it long afterwards. The time was coming when he would put two and two together to make five!

"He's one of the most brilliant men they've got in the House of Lords," he said. "His father was good, but he is better. An undersized chap; nothing to look at. They used to say he was consumptive. He married some German girl; a Grand Ducal Highness. Don't you remember? It was soon after we got married. There was a great fuss. She is almost Royal, but she can marry who the dickens she likes. Gets all the swagger without the restraint. That sort. You know."

"I know," Amaza nodded, in her way. And she was watching him. "The lace on her wedding-dress had been worn by Mary of Guise."

"How you women do remember silly things like that!" he said, and went on reading political snippets, before he turned to the Turf topics.

Again Amaza sat silent by the fire; a little closer to it, a little more nestled into her lots of cushions. Nothing else.

Humphrey threw the paper from him in a crumple on the couch and yawned. He betrayed the clean pink cavern of his mouth. Why lift a hand before your wife?

"I nearly turned in and listened to Sebastien to-day," he said. "He's giving mid-day addresses to men at that queer old church near my office. It's Advent now, ain't it?"

"Very likely," said Amaza. "I can't remember if it comes before or after Christmas."

She did not now-a-days go to church. So far, she only turned to religion when she was miserable; and misery was for ever past. The joy of this world was safe and all sufficient. Religion, without doubt, was a food; it was ideal and a manna. Yet one wasn't hungry just now, nor ever likely to be hungry again. Humphrey, for his part, sometimes went on Sunday evenings to the up-to-date chapel off Tavistock Square. It was intellectual. It was much superior to what he called the "tub-thumping" at the Conventicle, which, so long ago, had enchained Amaza's father. Church going he had always found dull. He hoped that, later on, Amaza would put on what he called her war-paint and go to the fashionable chapel on Sunday evenings.

"He's drawing crowds. I expect he'll go to Rome in the end, for he's that sort."

"Dear Sebastien! He deplores secessions. He will never be a traitor," said Amaza valiantly.

"Well, his aunt thought he would, anyhow. She's dead. Did your stepmother tell you? She left her money to the Mob."

Humphrey said Mob as Cordelia said House.

"Left every penny," he went on to explain, "to those chaps who go and kick up a shindy at St. Paul's when there's anything special on. Wickliffe preachers, don't they call themselves? Enough to make old Wickliffe turn in his grave, I should think: a set of vulgar spouters."

"I wish you'd gone and heard Sebastien."

Amaza sat up as she spoke. The colour came back to her face; the mystery and pain died down in her eyes.

"Well, perhaps I will next Friday. Shall I bring him along to dinner, if I do?"

"That would be nice," said Amaza, after a pause. "Or wouldn't it be nice?"

For she was not sure if she wished to see Sebastien. He belonged so completely to the ideal and beautiful past. She preferred to keep him as a cunning ornament and not of daily use.

"You must know whether it would or wouldn't."

Humphrey stared. "Did he," he chuckled, "ever make love to you? Cordy says he did."

"I suppose he did, in a way."

"Well, there's only one way." Humphrey's eyes were bigger. "Why didn't you marry him?"

"He didn't ask me and I hadn't met you. That's all."

"Hanged if I can make head or tail of that."

"There wasn't any head or tail; only heart, darling. And Sebastien's was in his work. He will never marry."

"He was always an odd fish. You should hear those Leith chaps talk about him. Lots of people talk; he's famous in a way. They hate him like hell."

"I'm not sure that parsons ought to hate like hell."

"How you do quibble! You see, he's High and they're Low. Cyril is prosing on at Grainingfold just as the old buffer did before him, and James's church at Hampstead is of the same cut. It will be nice for you to have Cordy so near. You can run along in the Tube to Hampstead, later on, in no time."

"So I can." She, however, looked listless. "Where are they going for their honeymoon?"

"She did say. I can't remember. They'll only be gone a week. Was it Torquay? Hanged if I know! Somewhere mild, anyway."

"It would be. James is so mild."

"Mealy-mouthed chaps, both of them. But he's taken Cordy off our hands. You wouldn't like her living with us always?"

"I wouldn't have had it for a moment," declared Amaza.

She looked more spirited than usual, and he liked that.

"Give me a touch of the termagant," he often thought, when his wife's fond passivity oppressed him.

"Cordy was a bit of a boss, but she meant well," he said, "and I'd rather have her any day than Marcia."

Amaza answered nothing. She sat there, keeping quiet, the clock kept ticking. That was about all there was, and it got on Humphrey's nerves after a time. He fidgeted about to the window and back again. He stood on the rug and tugged his stubbly yellow moustache:

there was always a nice touch of ploughed fields in it, thought Amaza, whose passion for the country kept fresh.

"Don't you feel dull?" he asked wistfully. "Isn't there some sort of game that two could play? I don't mean bezique or cribbage or anything of that old tabby sort, but a gambling kind of game, and yet," he laughed, "What's the good of winning money of your wife?"

"Not a bit. And don't be a silly boy. Sit down and talk. Tell me things."

"I've told you every blessed thing that I can think of. I cudgel my brains every night as I come home."

Amaza got up, hesitating for a moment. She went and kneeled before his chair.

"How good you are!" she said, and trembled.

Humphrey put his arms round and tight. He loved her very much. He only wished that she would be more jolly; that was all. It wasn't much to ask of any wife. No doubt she would be jolly and like a joke later on.

"Silly kid!" he said fondly. "Don't cry over my virtues."

For those were tears in her eyes.

"You're done up," he went on, and looked at the clock on the shelf, and, pushing her slightly from him, feverishly compared it with his watch. "I didn't know it was so early; only nine. Don't you think it would be better if you went to bed and I went to the club for a bit? It's a fine night." He walked to the window as she returned to her chair. "Come and look at the stars."

"No. You tell me."

"I can't tell stars."

"Astrologers did." Amaza laughed in her ringing way. "Would you like to go to the club, Humphrey?"

"Well," he was on the rug again and tugging his stiff, most rebellious moustache. "Of course I won't leave you if you'd rather not, but you'll be going to bed soon, and I——"

"Yes, you'd better go," she said. "I thought the club was dull too."

"So it is, confoundedly dull, but——"

"Not quite so confounded as this?"

"Don't twit a man at every word he says, my pet.

I think you must be tired." He looked at her drawn mouth. "Your nerves are all to pieces, Amaza. Let Turvey bring you up a glass of wine."

"I hate wine. I never touch it. There is nothing the matter with me, only I want you to be happy. What is the good of—of everything—if you are not happy?"

"I'm as happy as a sand-boy, only——"

"Sand-boys want sand to play with. There I am twitting you again. Don't be cross."

"I'm not; you've hit the mark—if you'll call a pack of cards sand," he said good-humouredly. "I like a game now and then, and there are sure to be a few fellows in the card-room."

"Well, then, you go."

Yet she clung to him.

"The club," he said, wavering between the fire and the door, "is rotten. It will bust up before long. Every one is saying that. The catering is awful. I should like later on to take you to lunch, we entertain ladies on a Wednesday, but——"

"I won't go to lunch," said Amaza, speaking very violently. "I don't like clubs."

"Precious little you do like, upon my word."

"Precious, precious little,"—she followed him appealingly to the door and slipped her hand through his arm —"only you."

"You are a darling!" returned Humphrey boisterously, "and I wouldn't leave you for worlds if I thought you would rather I stayed at home."

"I want you to do just as you like."

"It comes to this,"—he put his arm round and held her—"you'll be off to bed in half-an-hour. If I'm going at all it ought to be soon or I shan't get a game. And then another thing, I shan't have a club after Christmas. For this one will certainly go under."

"But aren't there lots of others?"

"Heaps. I've got my pocket full of prospectuses now. I've been looking out for some time."

"Come to the fire and show them to me." Amaza softly pulled at him. "No, I don't want to look. Never mind."

"Of course you don't. They are all pretty much the same; just a guinea or two more or less subscription. A lot of our men have gone over to the Tamarind Tree, already."

"The Tamarind Tree!" There was that wild look about her that he knew: an idiot grown dangerous; that sort of look, so he thought uneasily. "Yours is a Fruit House, Humphrey. Do you know the taste of tamarinds?" She laughed. This she often did; while you wondered why.

"What are you driving at? Taste of tamarinds! I'm not a greengrocer and fruiterer. I don't"—he looked disgusted—"sell stuff over a counter."

He was, as he put it, completely "stumped" by her moods. Humphrey was not a man to be piqued and held by moods: leave that to the chameleon!

"No, of course not." She led him back to her chair and let him settle her in it. He did it so clumsily, and she liked it to be so. Her head fell back on the cushions and she looked beautiful.

He kissed her lax hands; he felt romantic, as he had done when first he fell in love. This was odd, since a man was married. He looked at the rich red wealth of her hair, at her strangely lovely eyes, at the fine line of her profile. She was well dressed too; she always was. Amaza, with her stepmother, was one of those who would invest a potato-sack with style. Not many men, he thought grandiloquently, had such a well-turned-out and showy wife. Later on, they would have a jolly good time together, he and she. For she must wake up and be like other women. He would show her off.

"Do you remember"—she looked merry and vague, and with a motion of the hand kept him kneeling by her side—as she had kneeled to him just now—"the book of my grandfather's with the bit about fruit?"

"I remember," he said, "but what's that got to do——" He broke off, staring at her flushed, mutable face.

"Shall I go and fetch it? Do you want it, Amaza? No doubt it is down-stairs in the old bookcase. I bought it just as it stood from the old girl."

He often spoke of Mrs. Meeks as the old girl. Every

woman not young was an old girl or, say he disliked her, an old cat.

"I don't want it. Keep still. '*Life is the House and Man the Fruit of his own Choosing.*' It fascinated me so. I used to say it the last thing at night, as if it were a text. I used to look at people to see what sort of fruit they were."

Humphrey said, good-temperedly grinning; and reassured since she laughed again—

"I remember you spouting it out there in the Gardens. You stood upon a seat. We all said it was rot, and so it was. Sebastien, the day after, told me that he'd got the hang of it. He was an impudent little beggar, always bragging, and I said I'd punch his head if he didn't shut up."

"You used to be so sulky in the Gardens. I can see you." Amaza smiled. "You haven't changed much; you still sulk when I won't do the things you want most. And I never shall; not some of them. You came up close when I got upon the seat, and you listened. I felt very grand and important, because you were much the biggest of us all. But you didn't matter very much, because I pretended that I swayed the world. I tried to speak into the farthest corner of it."

"I thought that you were cracked," said Humphrey frankly. "Cordy thought so too; lots of us did. Poor old Wally said, 'There might be money in her, because she's one all by herself.' He was always on the make."

"Very likely I was cracked, and am. And you don't know anything about the taste of tamarinds?"

"Tamarinds! How you do jump about! Not a blessed thing."

"I've got an idea they'd be bad for you, dearest," she told him whimsically. "Don't join that club, Humphrey. Promise me, promise me."

She was looking sharp and agonized.

"Very likely I shall hang on where I am," he said quietly. "Plenty of time to talk about that. The subscription isn't renewable until the New Year."

She was certainly excited and must not be distressed. What odd fish some women were!

"And now—good-night." She leaned her cool cheek

to him. "Have lots of games. Stay late; which will be early. When you do come in, come quietly, for I wake at once. And I'm afraid to wake."

"Afraid?"

"Things look so threatening in the night. What you can't see by day is so vast in the dark."

"You shouldn't go to bed so early; then you would sleep sounder," was his practical comment upon this.

He kissed her and shambled to his feet. He looked joyous and at once advanced to the door. He danced off; as a small boy let loose upon an expedition.

"I'll be as quiet as a mouse," he promised as he went. "I'll take off my boots on the front door mat. I'll crawl up to my room and you won't hear a sound."

Amaza went to the window and watched him cross the Square. When he was out of sight she stared upward at the stars. How beautiful they were; how baffling and most mysterious! Her glance was ravenous at this deep, twinkling sky. Hunger and the sense of search returned. If one might pierce that sky, read those stars and prove unshaken peace! For you were always being shaken, and just when you felt most secure.

Humphrey, unwitting, had half killed her to-night. She was nearly poisoned, and it was by the taste of tamarinds!

Looking wild and weak, looking afraid and so alone, she suddenly faltered back to the bell and rang it violently.

* * * * * *

Humphrey had quite a cheerful time. It was very early in the morning when he reached home and saw that the house was still stirring and alight.

They told him, as he entered, that his son was born. Recounting the event, as he did several times to City cronies later on in the day, he said, "I tumbled to what was up directly I saw all the lights. It gave me a queer turn, I can tell you."

Then he would drink the new son's health.

CHAPTER XI

THE GIFT

"I FEEL as if I were a reigning house." Amaza laughed as Humphrey lifted her. "I was born here and so was my father, and now there is my son."

When she said "my son" she threw up her head, showing proud and radiant; for already this atom was to her a magnificent man. She had decided on his career and marked his noble acts.

"I'll bet Lady Lanark feels like that," said Humphrey, "but little Lanark, for all his blue blood and noble lordship, couldn't carry his wife, like this. You're nothing of a weight, Amaza. They'll have to feed you up."

He carried her lightly from the bedroom to the little boudoir leading through and tucked her in upon a couch. The hospital nurse, in a majesty of snowy starch and carrying the child, came close behind. She looked important and tyrannical. Amaza knew that look.

"We don't want the little chap in here," said Humphrey, going up and peering gingerly at the comic red face. "I haven't had you to myself for weeks."

The nurse, at this hint, withdrew with a crackle. Amaza looked sorry.

"I can't bear him out of my sight," she confessed. "When they take him just round the Square,—and once he's been into the Gardens, the darling one,—I worry all the time, in case a motor-car should reel round the corner and knock the nurse over. It wouldn't matter about the nurse; there are so many and all alike; but there is only one my very own baby."

"Isn't that heartless? I suppose the nurse matters to some one."

"No doubt it's awfully heartless. When you give all of yourself to one creature, there are no little bits over."

"Not even for me?"

He looked jealous already. He was one of those men who can find no use for a baby until it is a year old at least and beginning to, as nurses say, "take notice." Humphrey would love his boy best at about seven or so and just when his mother was beginning to lose her sense of magic in him.

"Mrs. Huckson"—she did not trouble to assure him, she was laughing and looking adorable; even she had never before been so lovely as she was to-day—"jeers at me and says, 'Law, my dear; by the time that blessed child's three months old you won't take no more notice of his going in and out than if he was the cat.' I had a cat once, Humphrey, and I loved it; yet not so much as I do the baby."

She spoke quite calmly. She could regard black Beaumont as the one bright spot in the frightful dream. She was a mother now; and she was pure—past, present and future, immaculately pure. Everything had changed.

"I should think not; a cat isn't a human being. Are you quite comfortable? Shall I get some more pillows and things? Shall I poke up the fire?"

"Not a thing."

She took his clumsy big paw and, holding it tight, turned her radiant face to him.

"I'm so happy," she said simply, "more happy than I can bear."

Humphrey said, looking shy and absurd (you loved him when he looked like that)—

"I'm happy too; happier than I've ever been in my life. Isn't it jolly; the baby and everything and you!"

"Yes—jolly," said Amaza, adding, "jolly, jolly! What a funny word it sounds, when you say it often."

They were certainly happy; more so than they had been or would be. This time comes but once. As Humphrey carried her from the bed to the couch, her loose red hair delighted and teased him. It spread upon his shoulder and tickled at his cheek. When, more than once, he said, "How light you are," she once returned—"Am I? Then think of me as a leaf upon a twig."

This was fanciful; it was her baffling way of putting things and the way he did not care about. Yet he was in the mood to applaud everything she said and did to-day. And he was so glad that everything was well over. He saw a prospect of settling down and enjoying himself. He was sick of so many women about the place, Mrs. Huckson and the nurse; a stepmother and Marcia.

"We must decide about the christening," he said. "I've got a bit of news for you—a grand bit. The Lord Mayor will stand sponsor. He was a great friend of the governor's. It was Cordy's idea that he should be asked, so I did, and he said at once, 'Delighted, my dear chap, delighted.' Cordy's got her head screwed on the right way; she thinks of things."

"When she saw the baby," Amaza rippled, "what do you think was the very first thing she said?"

"Dunno! What?"

"She said, 'He's the very image of poor Wally.'"

Amaza did not add that Cordelia had piously gone on to hope that the child would grow up to be as a polished corner of the House, and a far better business man than his father.

"He isn't like anybody yet. Babies are like themselves, and deuced ugly at that," said Humphrey frankly. "But, look here, isn't it grand about the Lord Mayor? We'll have a swagger christening and ask everybody. He's a Strict Baptist (I've known him ever since I was a kid; he used to come to all our parties), but he'll attend church for the christening with pleasure. He's not bigoted. He has to turn up at all sorts of places in his official capacity."

"How nice!" Amaza's eyes sparkled. The very mention of the Lord Mayor suggested to her gilt coaches, gold sticks and all the gaudy things peculiar to the Lord Mayor's Show, which she had seen more than once as a child: and which things would certainly not figure at her son's baptism.

"He wants the child to be called after him," continued Humphrey, looking dubious; for you never knew how she'd take a thing. "You don't mind? We'd better keep in with him, you see. He's sure to give a handsome

christening present, and he may be a valuable friend in the future."

"I don't mind, unless it's a very awful name."

"There are two names—James and John. The old buffer wants both. I said I'd ask you first."

Amaza, after a pause, declared—

"They are lovely. We can call him Jim-John."

The baby was Jim-John to her from that hour and for the rest of her life.

* * * * * *

He was nearly three and life had settled down. Humphrey was, on the whole, glad to settle down; for romance was restless. He fitted himself very well into the niche of prosaic husband and father. If sometimes he still felt that odd sense of being cheated by Amaza, he threw it off quickly. And he found harmless amusement now and then in the society of other women. There was no vice in anything he did; it was just harmless cackling, dubious badinage—the moods which Amaza either overlooked or held her skirts from. It represented all the fun he found in life, and he would have been morose without it. So that, tacitly, they took to floating along streams that were twin, yet utterly different.

She was a very excellent wife and mother, and that was what you wanted most in a woman, after all. He granted that. Yet so much domestic virtue was a bit of a bore, and he usually took himself off after dinner. The child was a fine little fellow, and when he grew a bit older he'd be quite a companion. There was a very thin streak of paternity in Humphrey.

As for Amaza, she was a mother first and foremost. Love, for her, had never burst into flower before her child was born. He was perfect; he was peace and consolation and sturdy, laughing joy. He went before her upon the path of Life; a sunlit path, all flowers and singing birds. She did not look one step beyond him. She fitted her feet in the little prints of his. And she was not only happier than she had ever been in her life, but she was happier than any other woman living. This she knew. Take away every other thing and creature, leave one Jim-John, still there would be abund-

ant and abiding joy. Take away Jim-John, and the path of Life would be for ever dark. It would be desolate, wind-swept, barren and most dangerous. You would decline to walk along it any more.

She did not dare think these things, yet sometimes she dreamed them despite herself, and more than once she woke up crying fiercely and clinging to Humphrey. He confounded her for a silly, screaming jay. She would fall asleep upon her pillow, crying in a stifled, crazy fashion (for nightmares took long to leave you). She would be filled with that sense of helpless wrath and degradation which rough words always brought.

Humphrey used to laugh next morning over his ample eggs and bacon and say he didn't mean to be a bear. He suggested a light supper before she went to bed; too much supper, or too little, gave people bad dreams. His remedy for everything was a sliding scale of food. He hated to be disturbed at night, for he came in late from what he vaguely termed "places of amusement." Not only that, but he had admitted more than once that business in the City was not going well and that it worried him. When Amaza tried to take an interest in this and asked for details he lost his temper and flung a few more rough words; ugly, but not really ill-meaning: you don't blame an elephant for the weight of its foot!

Yet not a flower faded along the path, not a bird sang one note the less; for there was Jim-John. Humphrey, who had never counted very much, counted not at all. You must see that he had good dinners; you must see that he had good nights. This was evidently the speedy and the usual end of husbands. Eventually they decided that he should sleep in that little room on the second floor at the back of the house. It was quiet and he could come in at any time he liked. Amaza, delighted with this arrangement, so agreeable to both, lay alone in the big room, with her son in the room leading through. He was quite big now, and she managed him by herself. The nurse's post was a sinecure, for she was jealous of every woman who came near him. She was so fierce and vast in her absorbing passion for this one small creature who, to the rest of the world, hardly counted as one.

She did not realize how little she loved her husband until she found how much she loved her child. It needs a great love for you to prove the futility of a lesser one.

She lived in her own world, setting fairy boundaries all about her; shutting herself in with magic—herself and her child. She never caught the comments of the lookers-on. Cordelia and Marcia, each in their different Vicarages, and each developing into exactly the estimable type of Vicar's wife which Sebastien trounced out at, told her to her face that her attitude was idolatrous. She looked at them with smiling vagueness: the look they had learned to distrust.

The servants said to Mrs. Huckson—and Mrs. Huckson agreed—that very likely the child would die and "it would be a judgment" on Amaza. They all loved Jim-John and loved his mother (so far as one can go against nature and love a mistress!), but they revelled in ghoulishness and tragedy.

Meanwhile, one floated on, unheeding, blissful and blest. Jim-John was both steersman and captain of the bewitching craft.

"He's going to his first real party," Amaza said gaily one morning, just as Humphrey was starting off to the City. "It is in the haunted house over there."

She nodded through the window at it and began to talk of childish days; of the spider-like caretaker woman and of Sebastien. Humphrey looked bored and anxious. He barely answered. He was tired of what he called "her clack."

"Is it business that bothers you?" she asked, watching him; indifferent to him and content to be apart, yet hating him to be hurt or harried in any way.

"It's nothing." He seemed to appeal to her for a moment and then he clouded over. "Women don't understand. I shouldn't be worried if Cordy would hold her jaw. But she keeps writing letters, the parson chap puts her up to it, confound him; and she comes to the office. It's"—he got purple—"infernal impudence, and I've told her so. She hates Price, my managing man, that's about the bottom of it; she don't trust him. She thinks I leave things too much in his hands. Hang

it all, I pay her the share the governor left her in his will. So long as I can do that——"

"So long as you can do it!" Amaza looked puzzled; not frightened at all, not even interested, thought Humphrey hotly, but just silly. She was stroking his sleeve and looking up at him caressingly.

These ways drove a man mad. They didn't help. Money was the only thing that could help, and she didn't offer a penny. If he had a good lump sum just to tide him over this juncture, everything would be all right.

"Can you give me five minutes in the library?" he asked suddenly. He was at his wits' end to-day.

She laughed.

"Five minutes, yes; not one minute more. Jim-John and I are going for our after-breakfast constitutional; just three times round the Gardens. He can manage that. It's so delightful, the way he kicks out the toes of his shoes directly they are new."

"It wouldn't be, if you hadn't got the money to buy more."

"I suppose it wouldn't,"—the idea seemed to tickle her, "but——" She looked suddenly uneasy, for he seemed strange. "Why did you ask me to come in here, Humphrey? What is it you want?"

"Money," he said bluntly.

She shrugged, and airily returned—

"Oh, highwayman! But you are not"—her eyes scoffed merrily at his sedate City dress—"gorgeous enough for one. I must get you a flowered waistcoat. Simone would make it. She'd make any mortal thing if you paid her price."

"You drive me mad with your rattle," he said, and standing his top hat carefully on the table.

"Then call me a snake." She was still laughing, but added more gravely, "I can't help being just silly. I'm so happy, and once I was so miserable."

"You! When, I should like to know?" he asked, with the aggrieved air of the good husband.

"I don't know. Never—always; before Jim-John was born. He is my sun and always shining."

"Is that a pun?"

"No—indeed; but how bright of you to think it might be! Is it money you want?"

She brought out a beautiful purse, unlike one he had ever seen before. All her things were costly and quite different. She must be chucking away pounds upon trifles, while he was half killing himself in the City.

"You shall have all I've got; since it's money or life. I love my life too well to squander it."

"Don't play the giddy goat," he besought, and stood looking at her in a queer sullen way, his clammy face working, his eyes quite wild and feverishly bright.

She noticed carelessly that he was not so rosy and well groomed as usual.

"Is your money locked up, Amaza? Can you touch the capital, I mean?"

"I don't know; if I ever did know, I've forgotten. Go and ask my lawyer," she returned coldly.

"All right, I will. Suppose it isn't! Would you let me have the use of it for a bit? It's speculative, but perfectly safe, upon my honour. I can turn it over for you and very likely make it double. The fact is, I'm in a corner; nothing serious. These things are always happening in the City. A lump sum would give me room to turn. Don't stand staring like a stuck pig, or I shall wish I hadn't asked you."

"There seems a menagerie air about the house—part of Jim-John's Noah's Ark, perhaps," she said, with fanciful bitterness. "What between the stuck pig and giddy goat that you announce and the rattlesnake you hint at——"

"It's women like you that make men hit them. I didn't mean that. Don't shrink away as if I'd done it already; or you'll make me."

He was licking his lips and he looked savage. She knew that look very well and on many other men. No—she had just dreamed that look. It was part of her stock nightmare.

Humphrey laughed. He also could laugh and be inconsequent when he was desperate enough. If she wouldn't lend him money then he'd be hanged if he knew what was going to happen! Or, rather, he knew too well.

"I wish I hadn't asked you," he said.

In saying this, in the simple, tragic way he said it, he made a stronger appeal to her than he ever had before or ever would again. They stood close, for a moment; closer of soul than he knew. He was wretched, and she had a true, rare touch for misery. The barrier between them hitherto had been that he was always so happy and so shallow, so covered in with healthy flesh.

"You should have asked me before, my dear, my dear,"—her arms were softly, maternally about his neck, and she spoke as he'd heard her speak to little Jim-John. "Ridiculous boy! Why didn't you?"

"You'll lend it to me?"

He looked incredulous. Here stood a man to whom was held out a reprieve.

"I'll give it you; every penny—if I can. Find out. Just go to the lawyer, and when it comes to signing things, let me know."

"You are awfully generous."

He kissed her mechanically; he freed himself of her arms. He looked muddled, helpless and quite overcome.

"I'm not a bit generous." The old stupid air of perplexity was on her. "Money is nothing; while you don't want it. So long as I can have a trifle now and then for Simone and to buy boots for Jim-John, what is the use of more? I haven't"—she seemed suddenly delighted—"ever spent anything like my income. There is quite a lot in the bank. Have just as much as you like. I'd love to draw a big cheque."

"You're awfully generous," repeated Humphrey dully, for he couldn't believe it. He looked relieved and greedy.

"Will you drive into the City after lunch," he added, "and we'll go to the lawyer? Better clinch the thing."

He pulled playfully at her red hair.

"We'll find out just what you have got and I'll make a jolly good hole in it."

"I am taking Jim-John to his party at three," Amaza told him. "Nurse is fetching him home. I will be with you at four if that is soon enough."

"You'd better make it half-past three."

He picked his top hat from the table and softly polished it. He loved his top hat.

"Very well, half-past three. Are you going now? Is that Jim-John crying for me?"

"Let the rascal cry, it won't hurt him, for once in a way. And look here,"—Humphrey seemed quite happy again—"let's make a night of it. Do, old woman, just for once. We'll have a box at the theatre. I'll take you to a funny piece and make you laugh. We'll go and have a bit of supper at a little place I know afterwards. Why"—he laughed shrilly, for he was overjoyed, since she was lending him money and so saving him—"shouldn't we, I'd like to know? Cordy says I'm extravagant and naturally vicious. That's a lie. She's been a dozen times worse with her school-marm ways since she married a parson. There's no harm in me, is there now?"

He set himself crooked and looked jaunty.

"Of course not." Amaza spoke gently and seemed restless; she was dying to get away.

Humphrey always bored her to begin with and disgusted her as a finish. She was sorry for him and scornful of herself; yet the feelings could not be controlled.

"If I've got a jolly handsome woman for a wife why shouldn't I trot her about? It's a shame to waste your good looks as you do by sticking in a nursery all day. Nobody sees you. I want to make other chaps jealous of my property. All husbands feel like that, when they've got an article that's fit to show. Haven't you got a word to say? I'd rather you boxed my ears than look at me like—this."

He grimaced. It was a trick he had when her expression enraged him. He drew his mouth down and tried to simper. It was a monkey trick and a monkey face. Amaza felt as if she stared through the bars of a cage at the Zoo. She felt her body burn with shame—for him, for her. That distorted face of his draggled their humanity.

"Don't," she said. "Don't."

"But I do, do, do," he insisted, and working his

features idiotically. "Look here, will you come and have a jolly good time to-night or won't you? If the supper makes it too late, we'll cut that out and dine at the club first."

"You know I hate clubs."

She was looking timid.

"Nonsense; you'd like this one. It's ever so much better than the old one was."

"I'm so glad of that, for your sake," she said, speaking simply and from a wonderful way off. "How fortunate you didn't go to the other one."

"The Tamarind Tree, do you mean? But the joke is,"—Humphrey looked good-tempered, as he always did if you'd talk about the club—"the Tamarind Tree has come over to us. I told you so the other day, but you didn't seem to listen. It was in a bad way and——"

She wasn't listening now. She had not heard. Humphrey himself not only broke off, but looked a little alarmed and a lot annoyed. Take it all round, children were a confounded pest about the place. When the boy grew up and could come into the business that would be different.

Jim-John's ferocious howl rang down the staircase and penetrated the heavy door and walls of this dignified room.

"He couldn't make more row if he'd broken his neck," said his father. "Don't go running off, Amaza. I won't have it. Stay where you are. You'll ruin that youngster, just as you ruin everybody. Cordy said so only the other day, and she was right for once."

Amaza surveyed him; her eyes were flaming and meek.

"I won't go if you don't wish it," she said, and rang the bell instead; rang it with inordinate fury.

When Turvey came running, and then the nurse; when they assured her that Jim-John had only howled because the authorities insisted on washing his hands after bread and jam, Humphrey chuckled and said—

"There, I told you so. The servants can manage him a jolly sight better than you can. That's clear. You'd have let him smear his fingers over everything. Well, I

must be off." He looked at his watch. "It's all settled, isn't it? We'll dine at the club."

"No; not the club."

"If you don't like clubs, though I'm dashed if I can understand why, for you've never been in one, I'll take you somewhere else," promised Humphrey, trying not to look sulky. "We must celebrate the occasion, for you've been a regular brick."

"I can't come anywhere. I've got to give Jim his bath at seven when he comes home from the party. And now do run away, Humphrey, there's a dear boy. You've kept me ever so long. Price will be wanting you. Expect me at your office at half-past three. We'll have tea together somewhere; with lots of cakes, the kind you like."

She kissed him patiently.

"Will that do?" she said, speaking in the mournful coaxing way he knew and could not brook. He didn't want to be just petted and put up with. No man does.

"It will have to do, I suppose." He made a wry face. "But can't you see what good fun you're missing, all the time?"

"No one has so much fun and so good as I. You go to a theatre alone, darling, and tell me about it next day. I like that best."

"Rot! Half the things I do tell, you don't listen to."

Humphrey, however, kissed her back affectionately enough and went off in a good temper. Now-a-days, you rather dreaded his temper.

He thought to himself, "She deserves everything I can give her." She was, this he repeated several times as he dashed eastwards through the crowded streets, "awfully generous." She had saved the situation. Her attitude was all the more generous because, in his experience (limited strictly to Cordelia) women were more mean over money than men. They niggled and were nervous.

He would not call Amaza jovial rough names in future. He would not make faces at her. She did not like these things; she had no fun.

He blessed his wife, yet inwardly called her a blithering fool. He reckoned he would have a tough time with her lawyer. Women of her sort got ruined by the un-

scrupulous; you were always seeing it in the daily papers. What would have happened to Amaza had she remained unprotected? Some scoundrel would have fleeced her by now. Humphrey could respect Cordelia more; she had steadily refused to lend him a penny, although he had asked her months ago. All that she did was to deplore the untimely death of Wally.

Amaza, within ten minutes, was walking with Jim-John in the Gardens. The soft moist hand, so small in hers, filled her with joy; a something all purity and permanence. In it there was nothing of the feverish and the fleeting. She never looked beyond: to those days when the child would grow big, would be a gawky boy, a lumbering youth; would be a man and love some other woman perhaps more than he loved his mother. She did not look beyond. When you are quite happy, you do not look. Your vision is short and intense: yet, for the most part, man looks out far and vague—as a savage; since real, rapt joy is rare and brief. For Amaza, there was no such word as brevity. These days would last.

It was November, with all the softness of November and all the queer flashes of passionate colour: the sense of has been and will again be; promise and regret. When the sun shone, then trees above your head, and leaves fluttering at your foot, they were scarlet and amber and a burning, pure purple. Wines and essences contributed; old ivories were pressed in; the tones of ancient lace and coffered silks. All the artifice and cunning and longing of the world; all the things that men imagine and make and leave behind them, these seemed compressed into the gaudy, fading tints of leaves already doomed; leaves hanging loosely on the soot-laden branches of those big trees above your head, leaves prone in the soft gravel of the path or fluttering before the wind; leaves that Jim-John, with his short fat feet kicked at as he walked. When he saw an extra-lovely one he picked it up, with a shout of joy, and crumpled it in his hand and loved it—as if it were a shell upon the seashore.

The little wind that blew, it was so soft. Those old

houses round the Square were misty and most magical. It was a day of infrequent sun, of sudden cloud; of sharpness and of shadows. It dazzled and it drooped.

Amaza looked through the railings now and then; but it was a glance almost deleted of wonder and of search. She was happy of soul, and happiness thickens you: just as bodily indulgence spreads the features, so spiritual complacence blunts your better part. Now and then she remembered herself, as she had been. They were half-contemptuous memories. That little hungry staring girl walking round and round these very paths with Sebastien—what a morbid small person it must have been! That grown-up girl, looking into puddles, searching the very stars—she must have been stark mad!

Meanwhile, one romped and ran races with Jim-John and hardly saw the other children and the whispering, amused nursemaids. Amaza's devotion to her child was the joke of the Square.

It was certainly a charming day, yet rather uncertain. She kept looking through the flaming tracery of branches at the sky; yet only to ask if it meant to rain. Jim-John must not get wet. It was a pretty sky; blue now and then, trailed about by woolly tails of white cloud. It looked like little lambs and innocent sportiveness.

"In the spring," she decided, "we must have a week-end cottage in the country."

Sitting on a seat for a bit, when the child allowed he was tired, she thought how marvellous it would be to see him lifting his legs high and laughing as he walked through the long meadow grass. This was an indulgence one must not miss. They must certainly have a cottage. It was a pity that the Grainingfold one had been given up. Now that she was lending Humphrey such lots of money they would be able to afford anything. It had puzzled her lately when he had pulled a long face over expenditure and said "we can't run to this," or "we must draw in our horns" over that. It was quite absurd. In some ways, Humphrey was very childish.

So, the day drifting, she sat content. And it was the last day.

The gift was already on its way to her; of an incurable sorrow. The rare gift, whose most precious quality we are so slow to see! The pent-up heart bursts forth in tears; a rushing stream that nothing dams. How can you see clear with salt water flowing fast between you and your Gift?

They went home happily to an early lunch; then Jim-John, protesting lips and legs to the last, was put to bed and slept. Amaza sat by the cot, looking at the adorable flushed face and rumpled head. When he awoke, she took him in her arms and talked the wildest, sweetest nonsense as she dressed him in brand-new tea-party things.

She was very extravagant over his things, as she was with her own. Why not?

Cordelia and Marcia; all the wives and mothers of the Square; to say nothing of Mrs. Huckson and the servants' hall, condemned her on this count, also. Amaza had a thousand enemies; happy people have. The sorrowful have a thousand patronizing sympathizers: enemies perhaps are best to bear with!

When he was ready, she took him over herself to the haunted house. This once dour dwelling, tricked up and added to; refurbished and made splendid years before, was now occupied by the usual young English couple with a bouncing family. Mrs. Tuffle—who was Jim-John's hostess to-day—produced a new baby with about the same regularity as she changed cooks: and each incident was a component part of one's flourishing housekeeping.

She received Amaza with that pitying affability which the prolific bestow on the mother of an only child. The house was hot; full of children and rustle and giggle and cake. Jim-John at once responded to the birthday party air. The eldest Tuffle was six to-day. As he was led up-stairs to the nursery, one of a small procession that walked one leg at a time and clung to the solid balustrade, he turned fully round to his mother and bestowed on her a delicious look. It was chuckling and glad. It said, "Isn't this splendid, and why haven't we done it before?" She never forgot. She could hear him and

see him always. He stood between her and all that the Future was bringing. The rosy face, the dark head; sturdy red legs and fat hands—they were an indelible memory. Jim-John was a big, quite masculine child, with nothing of the velveteen frock and lace collar about him. He promised to be brutal and big; obtuse perhaps, yet strong and generous. Amaza imagined all this and cherished the prospect. She saw herself enfolded in the protecting shadow of a dark giant some day. Yet this was vague and the present was best.

When the children were gone and you could only hear their feet and voices—patter and shrill—far above, she turned to Mrs. Tuffle with a face that quivered.

"Didn't Jim-John look a darling?" she said quite tactlessly.

Plump young Mrs. Tuffle stared. She was a pink and white and drab-haired woman, remarkably like a rabbit. She had just about as much feeling as a rabbit, and had been heard to declare that she liked having gas at the dentist's.

Such women are the joy of dentists and the despair of the thoughtful. They shake the faith of the devout, and disturb the theory of an eternal soul.

Amaza was already feeling an odd touch of her old sadness; since the house was so noisy and well fed; so what Humphrey would have jovially called "jolly." Moreover, her idol was out of sight and hearing. She was one of those faithful creatures who forlornly cling to the particular idol through thick and thin and will not be comforted without it.

Her abstract sadness was deepened by the rabbit woman's blank expression: silly, yet with a touch of spite. Rabbits and hens and most mothers have all this in common. Mrs. Tuffle's neck-feathers were up, or her ears back, or anything you like!

"Of course he's a darling," she said quite coldly. "It's a pretty age. You ought to have another baby, Amaza" (she was one of those who would kiss you and call you by your Christian name on the smallest provocation). "It is a great pity to make too much fuss over an only one. It spoils the child."

"But Jim-John isn't spoiled a bit."

Mrs. Tuffle smiled. It was a palsied stretching of the muscles, and you could quite well imagine her administering a nauseous draught to Jim-John with the same ghastly travesty of mirth.

"Oh, nonsense," she said heartily and in the strident way that Humphrey liked (he was always quoting Mrs. Tuffle and her jolly ways), "he's a regular little rogue already, so far as I can hear. Servants will talk, you know. Don't look so angry. Don't go yet. You'll stay and have a cup of tea? Afterwards, we'll go up to the nursery and play Queen Ann, Queen Ann she sits in the sun. Gertie loves that game, and as it's her birthday I promised her we'd play it."

"I should hate Queen Ann in the sun—or the shadow," said Amaza, speaking frankly, laughing nervously, standing up. "I must go at once, please, I have an appointment with Humphrey. I'd almost forgotten."

"Must you really? What a pity!" The other woman rose with alacrity and rang the bell. "Now you remember" (she kissed the pale face with a sounding smack, her front teeth seemed to bite you) "what I say and don't spoil Jim-John. I know what I'm talking about. With five, you haven't time for feelings and that sort of nonsense. It's just patent foods and mending all the time, however much money you've got. And I should be afraid to make such a fuss with one of mine as you make with Jim-John."

"Afraid!"

"Sometimes God takes a child away, for our good," said Mrs. Tuffle, pulling down her pale pink mouth.

Morality was a natural part of her equipment, and she could fling a dozen adages at you without stopping to think.

Amaza drove into the City with all of this ringing desolately in her ears. It was a regular ding-dong of prospective tragedy. She actually told Humphrey about it when they met, for one had to tell somebody and he was there.

"I'm afraid they'll let him fall down-stairs," she said, shivering. "I wish I hadn't taken him. Amy

Tuffle doesn't care for anything but her own great rough children. And they know the stairs; Jim-John doesn't."

"Don't be an ass," laughed Humphrey—and watched her wince at the word and was angry with her.

For he had purposely substituted ass for fool; he did not wish to hurt her feelings. She was so absurdly sensitive. Ass was a sort of pet word, he thought. Silly ass was quite fond.

"Don't be down on Mrs. Tuffle," he supplemented. "She's a jolly good sort. Nice brisk little woman. You can hear her laugh all over the house. It carries like a blessed bugle. I like that. She enjoys a good story too. She'll sit on the arm of Tony's easy-chair and smoke a cigarette with us."

He was rather fond of dropping in to have a smoke with Tony Tuffle after dinner.

"We'll be off to the lawyer's," he said, ringing for a clerk, to whom he gave a few pettish final instructions. He was nervous.

Amaza was very glad when it was all over; the dusty digging out of Humphrey, the long arid discussion and little prudent fight at her lawyer's. But it was done in the end, as all things are, and Humphrey appeared inordinately pleased.

They went and had tea somewhere near. He seemed to wish it. Amaza, as he reminded her, had promised. Happiness with him to-day took the expressive form of, as he said, "chaffing" the fuzzle-headed tea-shop girl. He had an incurable penchant for this type of young person; and he turned to it in his light-of-heart moods.

"I forget how many pastries I've tackled," he said simply, when the time came for paying the bill.

The young person, with an indulgent smile and a toss of the head, declared it to be five.

Amaza was glad when he put her in a cab and sent her off. She was very glad.

"I don't think I'll come back to dinner," he said sheepishly at the last. "Would you mind?"

"Not a bit." The quick answer and glad look was not lost even on him. "Go to the theatre, dearest. You love that."

"You've been a trump, Amaza. I can pull round now. Shall I tell him Russell Square?"

"No, Hanover Street. I'm going to Simone first. Good-bye." She nodded gaily.

The cab moved. Humphrey's red face and lifted hat faded out. One was exhausted and overjoyed. It was so nice to feel that he was happy.

As she skimmed down Cheapside, she watched the jumble of mean and haggard faces. They were very ugly these City men; and such a puny ugliness. Could one wonder! The dust and dirty-parchment feeling of the two offices in which she had sat to-day, looking the wild, richly-decked bird, oppressed her still. Could you wonder that they were yellow and thin and stunted, these men who lived upon husks and parchment; and whose whole appetite was set upon such arid diet!

You felt so ineffably sorry for fathers; they had none of the joy. It was true—she recalled Humphrey's round red face; all flesh and foolishness—that he was neither lean nor ugly. But then, as Cordelia so often said and as he admitted, he was hardly a civilized man at all. He had nothing in common with this careworn, crabbed crowd. He would be more at home in a new country, with a mattock and spade; with a gun and a dog; with a little dwelling made mostly of corrugated iron and pitch-pine. That would suffice for Humphrey; say there was plenty to eat and drink inside and a jolly good joke, none too pinched and flavourless, to pass round the table with the bottle.

The interview with Simone was long and exacting. It was a difficult fit to-day; fashions of the moment were trying to Amaza's particular figure, and both had to be coaxed. She stood, at peace and in silence, as Simone's fitter patted and pinned and pulled and chattered—and promised a garment for to-morrow week which you knew quite well you wouldn't have for three weeks at the least. A garment which you did not really want—yet one must fill up the time somehow! It was only six, and Jim-John wouldn't be back till half-past. Hearty Mrs. Tuffle had pleaded for an even later hour, "just for once in a way," but Amaza had been firm.

She listened to Simone and to Simone's French fitter; she looked at their pretty tags of fringe and trimming; absently consenting or choosing: consenting all the time, although she thought she chose. This was the masterly cunning of Simone.

It was nice to have a charming new frock, and these astute women declared it would suit her perfectly. Yet it was nicer far to drive away and say quite gleefully to the driver—

"Russell Square, and as soon as you possibly can."

For, somehow, time had sped, and, to her compunction, it was past seven. She felt quite nervous and fluttered; as a woman going to meet a lover. No grown man had ever stirred her so. She would see Jim-John again and listen to his beautiful, broken chatter about the party, and undress him and put the round pink body into its bath. All the time away from him—with Humphrey, with Mrs. Tuffle and Simone—that had been waste time and just a patient filling up; a composed philosophy. Nothing more.

* * * * * *

There was a bobbing crowd in the Square as she drove round the corner. There were voices and faces and flickering lamps. There was a sinister change in her own house. As the cab stopped, Mrs. Huckson broke off—as a splinter—from compacted humanity. She caught hold of Amaza, who was standing still and looking vaguely round. There was pity and excitement and tragedy on all the faces. Women were wiping their eyes. What was it? She said inside herself, Good God! She looked remarkably silly. Yet she was strange with God. She knew Him little. She had forgotten.

Mrs. Huckson, arms all round and blubbering face pressed close to one, sobbed—

"Oh, my lamb, my lamb."

Then you were led into the house.

* * * * * *

While they poured into her ears the broken, frightful tale, she was smiling blankly from face to face. She did not feel it very much. She did not faint or scream

or try to start away and rush to Jim-John. She felt it hardly at all. It was melodrama, and one wanted to laugh at it—almost! The biggest things, these you do not feel so much at the beginning! Long, dark anguish comes later and sits by your side and will not budge.

"That woman," Mrs. Huckson spoke vehemently, "ought to be drawn and quartered. I hope she will be."

"The best thing she can do is to make away with herself," said another voice—it was the cook's.

"Can't we be left alone? Won't you take me up to him?" asked Amaza, finding her tongue at last and clinging to her nurse.

"Yes, yes; of course, my dearie," was the answer; and so it was that the other women filtered away and the house and the very Square outside seemed suddenly quiet.

Mrs. Huckson again told her simple tale; so simple, so swift. The awful things always are. No warning, no hint before. Bright sunshine, calm airs—and then the furious storm!

Briefly, Jim-John on his way home across the Square in the dark had been knocked down by a motor-car and badly injured. It was all told quickly; just on the way through the hall, for a moment in the dining-room and now on the way up-stairs.

"It was that nurse's fault. Not a hair of *her* head's injured. She let go of his hand." Mrs. Huckson reiterated, and, finding apparent solace in this fierce remark, "she ought to be drawn and quartered, that's what she ought to be, the careless hussy. She was flirting with the postman. Turvey saw her with his own eyes!"

"She ought to be killed. I should like to do it myself. I will if I see her," said Amaza simply, and Mrs. Huckson, looking shocked and terrified, patted her on the back and said—

"Ssh! Ssh! There, there, my dear."

It would be better, this she confessed when she got back to the kitchen again, if Amaza cried. When people could not cry, they became dangerous. You had, perhaps, to put them away, poor things.

He was oddly moaning up-stairs in the big room, on his mother's wide bed—Jim-John!

They let her go in, and she felt that she ought to rush to him and cry and hold him close to her and close; so that she should not, could not lose him. They expected this of her and they dreaded it; the doctor and those others round the bed. Mrs. Tony Tuffle was there, crying; looking guilty and pink and a perfect rabbit. It was from her house that the child had trotted blithely to his tragedy. There was a funny moaning coming out from that bed, pent all about with people.

Amaza wanted to run to him; she was expected to—were they not all ready to drag her back when she did! Yet it was too much trouble. She stood still. They said to her, "He doesn't feel anything. The noise means nothing."

She stared at the doctor. He was a fair man, middle aged; gone silvered and dusty. He looked nothing but a shadow. It was all shadowy. These were no real moments. One would wake up in a minute and laugh. One look at the doctor's face was quite enough. Jim-John was going to die. He was putting out to sea; the little craft—treasure ship! She would be wringing her hands upon the shore, for all her life. Yet you couldn't be bothered with thinking about it yet.

It was only a nightmare.

She turned away and walked to the window, lifting a corner of the blind, looking stupidly down at the Square which was so deserted now, so calm—sea after storm!

When Mrs. Tuffle came up behind and touched her and tried to cuddle her into an ample, penitent embrace—then she knew! No longer did any sound come from the bed.

They all covertly said—Mrs. Huckson and the servants; Tony and Mrs. Tuffle—much the same thing, "that it was really half Amaza's fault." She had spoiled the nurse; just as she had spoiled Jim-John. The nurse was not used to the care of the child. She had never been allowed to touch him. She had forgotten her duty, lapsed her training. Could you wonder that

she was careless? No doubt most nurses were careless; yet these terrible accidents only happened once in a blue moon. *It was a judgment on Amaza.*

This and lots of things, they said; while Amaza sat smiling and speechless and stony, while Humphrey was roaring and encoring at a music-hall, with a friend (and such a friend!), while Jim-John, with an air of dignity strange in an infant, lay rigid on the big bed; those windmill limbs of his quite still.

It was late—rather, it was early—when Humphrey rocked round the Square. He was feeling a little at sea. He had been too happy to come home and go to bed. A big load was lifted from him. Amaza had done it, bless her heart. He would be kind to her and careful.

He arrived very early—just as he had done the other time; when they told him that his son was born.

Tony Tuffle, looking haggard, was waiting and all ready for him. He had rehearsed the disclosure with his wife over and over again, through the long hours while they waited.

"I'm sorry for Amaza, but I'm ever so much more sorry for Humphrey," she kept saying, as she sniffed.

She was fond of the big rough fellow; with his fresh face and his broad jokes. She had a confused feeling that his wife treated him badly.

It was to the Tuffles that Humphrey blubbered his first grief.

Then, all three looking grey, they took him to Amaza. She sat by the window, her head back, her lips parted, staring at the wall. Mrs. Huckson was feebly patting her hands; chafing and kissing them; calling her now and then—by her own name, by childish pet names. She was at her wits' end. What could you do with this stricken mother who would not cry?

CHAPTER XII

THE FRUIT HOUSE

After Death or a living sundering comes the long, cold pause; the time when your very soul is stiff; when you move through the world in a mist, when people's voices sound a long way off and their faces fail; when nothing that you touch is in any way real; no, not even your own flesh.

Amaza moved through this mirage. She kept on living, as a matter of course. People do; dying is just a matter of physical constitution, and hers was good. It was settled that she should be an aged woman.

Humphrey had grumbled, through his noisy gulps of grief, to Cordelia, after Jim-John's funeral, "Every night when I come home, fagged out with the City, she'll have been crying."

He clung to Cordelia, although he ruefully felt she was a spike. In the months that followed, he went down often to the ugly red vicarage at Hampstead. He went to the club also. It was a jolly club; a big and flourishing one, and the Tamarind Tree men who had come over to it were agreeable. Some of them were actually titled, moreover, Humphrey—with every Mallard born—was a natural snob. With Cordelia, with the club, with the Tony Tuffles, he could, he admitted, grub along. And he saw very little of Amaza. She did not need him; this was clear. His clumsy attempt at consolation never pierced her, for she demanded a finer point than he possessed. When sometimes he touched her—a gawky, impulsive caress—she rubbed her cheek, or brow or hand, as if a midge had bitten there.

He wondered if she even saw him.

Her world had been Jim-John. And he was dead. You could just move along—palsied; but you could not possibly be bothered with the different people who

knocked up against you. This was Amaza's attitude towards Life. She hardly saw the troops of tearful women who came into the house and went out of it: her stepmother and the Langfields; Marcia, Cordelia, plethoric Lady Leigh—every one. She jumbled them up.

She listened to what they said and she vaguely smiled. She let them kiss her if they wanted to and let them hold her cold, limp hands. She was always cold.

"She's quite cracked," Humphrey confessed to his sister on a day in early Lent. "What do you think she was up to the other morning? I found her myself, kneeling in a corner of the nursery and laughing and spreading out her hands. She said over and over again, 'Very well, then, no breakfast for naughty Jim-John.' She used to put him in the corner like that. He had the very devil of a temper." Humphrey spoke with pride.

"I tell you, it nearly bowled me over. She looked so jolly happy, until I gave her a shake," he admitted, and his face worked. "It's a pretty bad thing to lose a kid, Cordy; and by a damned piece of carelessness, too."

"It's an awful thing," she agreed placidly, "but all trouble comes from God and is for our good."

"It's easy to say that when your own kid's alive and kicking," he retorted. "But I didn't come to talk about Amaza. We can't do anything. She's got to worry through."

"I don't agree with you. Something ought to be done. She must be roused." Cordelia looked up from her tacking. "Why can't she go away for a change? It is madness to let her stay alone in that great house all day."

Humphrey shook his head.

"She won't budge," he said forlornly. "I believe that old cat of a Huckson woman makes her worse than she would be."

"I wonder if Amaza would care to come here." Cordelia measured her coarse flannel carefully—she was making wrappers for the sick poor. "Baby might be a comfort. She is only a year younger than your poor little James."

"Come here!" Humphrey whistled. "She looks at

every woman with a baby as if she'd like to steal it or murder it. We thought at first that she would murder the nurse. I packed the infernal devil out of the house without a character."

"It was a very sad occurrence; terrible—but you needn't swear," said Cordelia. "Your language gets worse. Once it was only slangy, now it's profane."

For a wonder, Humphrey did not resent this. He sat silent; jabbing the points of Cordelia's scissors into her cutting-out board. She watched his great brutal hands.

"Can't you see, confound it,"—he stared at her prim figure—"that a little bad language gets the thing off my chest?"

"But, Humphrey dear, there are other consolations."

Cordelia and Marcia had resolved into the typical smug Vicaress sort; the kind that Sebastien had trounced out at. They could preach all the time and without a pulpit.

Cordelia was devoutly philosophical; so long as things went well. But if any one in the parish snubbed her for her well-meaning efforts at managing, she lost her temper at once. Moreover, if her baby girl coughed in the night she awoke in a perfect panic and sent the Reverend James Leith post-haste and shivering for the doctor. Cordelia had one great terror for the present, and its name was Croup.

"Don't jaw me about religion, Cordy. I never took to it."

This was true enough. He had even given up the Unitarian place where you wore evening dress if you wanted to. He said he "couldn't agree with what the chap said."

"You ought to have taken to it," his sister said severely. "Just think how strictly we were all brought up. And I never knew a more beautiful death-bed than dear Wally's. With Amaza, poor girl, it is quite different. One doesn't look for Christian fortitude there. The Conventicle was a fearful place."

"She used to go to church with Marcia. She goes by herself sometimes now," Humphrey said, speaking valorously. "She sneaks out to afternoon service after

lunch on Sunday. When I wake up, she's gone. You know how heavy a chap gets on Sunday after lunch."

"She used to go with Marcia at Grainingfold; but that's nothing."

Cordelia pondered as she spoke.

"She wouldn't like, I suppose, to go and stay with Marcia? The twins are boys, and such healthy little chaps."

"She'd strangle 'em," returned Humphrey curtly.

He looked honestly puzzled. These women who also were mothers, they did not seem to understand Amaza's lonely pain. He didn't. But you expected more from women. He had marked the same glittering heartlessness in jolly Mrs. Tony Tuffle. Hanged if they didn't seem glad!

"She can't go to her stepmother." Cordelia chose to ignore his positively sinful remark. "Mrs. Meeks has let the new house furnished and for a long term. She and the Langfields are going abroad. They start on Holy Saturday."

"The old girl's got her head screwed on the right way," returned Humphrey sullenly.

He was in the mood to resent all business success, for his own affairs were at last quite desperate.

"Look here, Cordy,"—he jabbed so hard with her scissors that he broke a point—"I didn't come to talk about Amaza and the poor youngster. You must be sick of it."

"Dear Humphrey!"—she was reproachful—"how could we be! Our hearts bleed for you both. But every one feels that Amaza loved the child too much and so——"

"It got collared. Seems queer," he said—and sat staring, the broken scissors in his big hand.

From the first, women had watched Amaza's smiling, flaming joy in Jim-John and resented it. She had dared to imply, by her worshipful attitude, that her child was lustier and more lovely than their children. This was the unforgivable sin. Amaza was mad and most reprehensible. For three years they had watched for this sword that had stretched itself now between her and her idol.

Cordelia looked at her watch and made a noise with her lips. She sounded like a startled woodchuck. In a man you'd have called it a whistle; in a less godly

woman, a faint expletive. But Cordelia was bursting with virtues of the warranted-to-wash-and-wear-well sort. She never even said "Bother!"

"I've got a Mothers' Meeting at five, dear," she said, with that patient air which marks suppressed temper. "What will you do? James is out, unfortunately, but you can smoke in the study. Not your nasty coarse pipe, Humphrey. And why"—she seemed to remember—"did you leave the City so early? It isn't Saturday."

"I haven't been to the City since Tuesday. I came to tell you that. Can't somebody else look after your Mothers, just for once? Don't suppose I shall bother you much more."

He stood up. He approached her pleadingly. He still held the scissors and he looked absurd. He seemed starving for affection of any sort. More than ever, his sister felt furious with Amaza. There was a queer look in his eyes. Something was certainly amiss.

Cordelia had a brisk mind. She rang the bell and gave the parlourmaid some curt instruction. When she and her brother were alone again she said—

"Sit down, Humphrey. Miss Jay can take the Meeting. I've sent word."

Miss Jay was one of those ubiquitous old maids who are the support of the good Vicar's wife. She could always be relied upon for any emergency. She would cut bread and butter for Social Gatherings, by the yard. In the spring she made marmalade and sold it for charities. She would go round with leaflets and distribute collecting boxes, representing the missionary enterprise of the parish. She would even mind the baby if you were in a domestic corner. Cordelia spoke of her as "poor old dear" and kissed her effusively whenever they met.

"I haven't a single soul I can turn to," said Humphrey, looking so desolate that Cordelia came close and stroked his stubbly hair.

"Not a soul! What about Amaza?" she said, bristling—Mallard for Mallard!

"She sits in the house like a mute, all in black. You might as well talk to a mute. She's just about as cheerful."

"She looks much better in black than in all that odd mixing of reds and violets she used to get from the Frenchwoman. It was expensive and bad taste," Cordelia said, looking complacently at her grey skirt and her white shirt with a faint hair stripe.

Humphrey looked at them too.

Cordelia, who loved to be dowdy, could now glorify her leaning; lift it into a cardinal virtue; since a fashionable Vicar's wife would be not only anomalous, but improper. She, with the main of non-charming women, had a great dread of impropriety and considered that it constantly threatened her. Nothing but her own lofty character had saved her from it.

"Marcia often says how shocked she was when first she met Amaza. She was dressed in every colour of the rainbow. If Marcia hadn't been so off her head about Herbert, they might never have become such close friends."

Humphrey said—a queer thought staring sluggishly in his head, and, with all ephemera, growing to full size at once—

"How the dickens did she meet Marcia, and when?"

Cordelia looked at him. Their eyes, so alike, said several things. It was a funny moment.

"I don't know," she said impressively, and flushed. "I never asked. I will when I see Marcia next. That won't be just yet; for we both think it wrong to travel in Lent or partake of any social dissipation. I don't look in a shop or buy so much as a piece of tape if I can possibly avoid it."

Humphrey, in the middle of his trouble and puzzle, laughed at this. He had his sense of fun; when he could find it. Usually he was too busy; eating and drinking; trying to "have a good time."

Cordelia, unheeding, continued—

"Ask Amaza yourself when you go home. That will be best. Mind you remember."

"It isn't any good asking her anything, and it doesn't matter a rap. Why should it?" He spoke defensively and, putting the scissors on the table, thoughtfully bit his nails.

"Amaza"—he scowled at his sister—"is more sensible

in some ways than she used to be. She doesn't say the crack-pate things she did. But you can't get much out of her."

"She used to say such shocking things." Cordelia nodded. "No doubt this great trouble is a blessing in disguise."

"Hang blessings. I've got too many by a long chalk. Look here, Cordy, I've come down to-day to talk business. I suppose you know by this time what that means."

"I suppose I do." She was suddenly cold; she sat down and took up the useful hideous flannel. "You want me to lend you money and I won't. James will not let me."

"That's exactly what I don't want. So there!" said Humphrey, with childish defiance. "It's worse than that. Now do you know?"

Cordelia dropped the flannel into a heap on her lap. Her lean hands closed round it. She knew. And she flinched; for the Fruit House was the pride of her life.

Yet she was one of those practical persons who never cry over spilt milk; remarking that at least you'd got what was left in the jug!

"The Bankruptcy Court, Humphrey?"

"Great Powers, no!" he nearly shouted. "That's just like a woman, upon my word."

"Well, then, what is it? Why do you frighten me so?"

She threaded her needle. It was a tedious job; the cotton bobbed about before the eye.

"It's just this; things are rotten. I've felt for a long time that it would be better to wind up the London business; sell every stick, go out to the branch House and start fresh. I've made up my mind. I tell you. I haven't told Amaza yet. She don't matter."

He blurted out his misery, his failure and anxiety in a few curt, shot-like sentences. He waited for the verdict. His sister would fly at him.

But Cordelia was splendid. This was a terrific shock; yet she did not say "I told you so," nor did she refer to the detested Price or the commercial aptitude of the late Wally.

"James and I"—she looked smugly round the hideous

handsome room and sighed—"will always have enough for our simple wants and our overflowing charities."

Her saintly expression nettled Humphrey.

"I suppose it's natural you should think of yourself first," he said, "but you needn't worry. This isn't ruin, remember, by a lot. There will always be enough to pay you your whack."

"Ruin! Of course not." Cordelia absolutely crowed with hearty cheerfulness (how distant and indifferent Amaza had been when he once or twice hinted at these things!)

"You'll just work up the business again from the other end; that's all," she said: and never for one moment believed it.

She was relieved, now that the murder was out. She had expected something of the sort for years. Humphrey was a responsibility and would be better out of England. He had muddled away a big business. But the mischief was done.

"How about Price?" she asked gently.

Humphrey tugged at his stiff moustache; the scanty, tow-tinted growth that would never lie properly down.

"Price is a rotter. I got rid of him. You were right," he admitted, and Cordelia was pleased.

"Why didn't you prosecute?" she said—and Humphrey, swearing as he thought fit, remarked that the manager was too clever for that.

"How about Amaza's money?" she persisted. "You had it all, didn't you?"

"Every blessed penny," he nodded gloomily, "and lost the lot. I did what I thought best. I speculated and then the shares went down and——"

"Humphrey! Why did you? It takes a long head to speculate and——"

"Mine's round; turnip of a head," he told her, grinning brightly. "Well, the money's gone. One comfort is, Amaza won't jaw me. She never does."

"I am sorry for Amaza," said Cordelia. And she truly was; more sorry than she had ever been in her life. Amaza was wounded in the place which Cordelia considered mortal.

"She'll be all right. I'll look after her." Humphrey

spoke quite lightly, now that he'd unburdened himself. "We'll grub along in a new place. The climate is jolly good and there's plenty of sport. The people ain't so stiff as they are here, and——"

"Dear Humphrey, it will be your salvation." Cordelia rose and actually kissed him.

He looked defensive, for he wasn't used to it, and her crackly lips didn't seem the right sort.

"But I'm sorry for Amaza. What will she say when you tell her? Shall I come and break it to her for you? Sometimes a woman is best."

"No, thanks. I'll do my own dirty work. You're a decent sort, Cordy, old girl, and I'll see you don't suffer. Tell James that from me."

"I do wish James was here," she said, and her eyes looked moist.

"I'm so precious glad he isn't," Humphrey chortled. "I pitched on a day when I knew he wouldn't be. You said he was lecturing on the Chickeryboos and that black lot on Tuesdays. I thought you'd be down on me. But you haven't been. I'm grateful. I'm no good at saying things. I didn't know you were such a brick. Amaza's a brick too, bless her. She won't say an unkind word. She'll do anything I say she is to. She'll want to drive off to the Frenchwoman for her outfit—that's all. And I shall have to put a spoke in her wheel, for we shall want every penny we can get together."

"Of course she won't dream of going to Simone. It is preposterous," Cordelia rustled. "There are plenty of good shops where you get things ready-made. Most serviceable things, and stylish too. I'll go shopping with her myself."

"There'll have to be an auction in Russell Square. She won't like that." Humphrey looked glum again. "I've told the Tuffles; nobody else. Mrs. Tony's a kind-hearted soul, but Amaza don't cotton to her. I said she'd better have the toys and things if she wanted 'em. There's a whole nursery full, and she's got five kids, where we only had the one."

"Poor Amaza! It is hard on her. There is a rocking horse, nearly new. I could do with that myself for Baby." Cordelia's manner added, "You might have

thought of your sister first." She disliked Mrs. Tony Tuffle and considered that Humphrey paid her injudicious attention.

She wiped her eyes (yet her tears were for a Mallard and the House: this interview had certainly been a blow).

"Amaza will have to leave the little grave and everything," she said.

Like most cold-blooded people, she was incurably sentimental.

"That won't worry her. She's never seen it. She says he isn't there. That's one of the things that makes me think she's off her nut. Most women would go round with a watering-pot. Mother did when Wally died," said Humphrey.

"Amaza will be quite a different creature in a new country," his sister assured him.

She was convinced of this. Why not? Every one knew that a thorough change worked wonders. And—her practical mind took a long flight—as time went on there would doubtless be other dear little children. James had been a bright boy, yet decidedly spoiled. His tragic death would be a lasting lesson to Amaza.

"I should sell up as soon as possible," she said, with some subtle air of authority.

It was an hour later. Humphrey had unfolded all the details of his business difficulties. He was clearly a poor relation and must be treated as such.

"You can't throw good money after bad," declared Cordelia, "and that Russell Square house must be most expensive to keep up. Amaza has so many servants. She doesn't seem to understand what economy means. You can both come here for a few days before you sail."

So between them, it was settled. Amaza, meanwhile, sat unheeding at home, staring down through the window at the Gardens and the flit-about children within the railing. She had been just such a child, and so had Jim-John.

Twice through the day, obeying the imperious mystic call of her heart, she hurried to the nursery and shut herself softly in. Alone there, toys scattered about, she was happy and life became real.

CHAPTER XIII

THE ARRESTING SPECTRE

Cordelia was as dire as her word. Within a week, he started dragging Amaza over London; Lent notwithstanding. The quite unconscious casuist argued within herself that few things could be more penitential than shopping with Amaza.

They went into strange shops and bought queer clothing. They travelled east of Tottenham Court Road. They patronized places that advertised themselves by half a page in the halfpenny paper.

Cordelia would sit patiently for hours in showrooms while things were hung upon Amaza. She would purse her lips and say, "That is an excellent fit," or she would say, with equal certainty, "That can be *made* to fit."

When the things were bought and paid for and sent home, Amaza's useful maid, marvelling and inwardly contemptuous, hung them upon the hooks of the wardrobe. Later on, Amaza herself would take them down and look at them in a whimsical way. They were very odd. She was evidently destined for a replica of Cordelia herself. She put on a coat and skirt. They hung about one strangely. There was such a lot of trimming, such an insistence on the pale silk lining.

She would turn these things about in her hands and softly laugh. She decided that—should they prove too much for her on the voyage, these showy, most disfiguring affairs—she would put them, one at a time, through the porthole in the middle of the night. Would that be possible? It sounded rather nice. She laughed and looked merry. The sound of the laugh and the look of her face in the glass startled and consoled her.

It was a lovely morning—April! One wasn't going to die. Less, was one going mad! Things would

never again be the same, yet they would continue—to be.

Day following day, she now revived her feelings of the first spring; that marvellous, regenerative time with Marcia. She regained her vision; she saw once more the things that she had ignored or passed over, while she had Jim-John and was so amply blest. She saw what there was to see, here in a quiet green corner of great London. She remembered the things she had seen down in Surrey years ago. Present and past were interwoven.

These witcheries of Nature, which never could lose their holding charm, since she found God in them, they plucked her softly by the sleeve. They prevailed. She remembered how, when she was with Marcia, morning after morning, and all through the day till dusk, the royal thrush, high upon a bough, had sat singing. She recalled those sane, strong days of early spring; sunlit, windy, mutable. And there had been days of clear, transfigured loveliness when even scarecrows achieved pathos and nobility.

Again, how one had adored the furious, south-west gales, that were yet so warm and pliable! Were you meaning to die or go mad, in such a magic world, when the gift of life was still yours and the gift of vision?

Only those of puny hearts and pulses died in their grief and of it. If you were strong enough to feel the rigours of some surpassing loss, you were strong enough to live on, for as long as God said. God meant nothing to her—not yet. He was constantly upon her lips and in her head. You would not live through your grief, or get over it—no, never; to lose the tender sense of it would be the last, the crushing blow. You would pass along, with Sorrow at your side; step-fellow, bed-fellow, second at your table. It would look mournfully into your eyes. It would press more near, become more beautiful and precious as the years went on. One would never try to give this yearning Shadow of a thing the slip.

It would cross the seas with her—Sorrow!

Humphrey, on leaving his sister that day, had gone straight back to his wife and admitted all things. Amaza

did not mind the loss of her money; she hardly minded the loss of the Russell Square house. When the big Bereavement is with you all the time, you lightly tread down every lesser one.

She did not mind the prospect of the new climate; so long as it would not be too sunny. Yellow sunshine all the time, a blaring blue sky, day in, day out, that would be rather terrible. It would be like listening to trumpets.

They were to sail after Easter. They were going to stay with Cordelia and James before Easter. Time was rushing on.

There was a touch of squalid agony to the thought of the auction; yet one wouldn't be there to see. Now and again she would roam about the place in an anguished way. The house meant something, after all. She said to herself, "Everything fails you and runs off."

It was awful, the way you lost things and people. Even Jim-John had played truant: yet a truant was one who hid round a corner, or went off for some brief merry jaunt; forbidden—yet harmless enough. He would return— say, rather—you would seek him out. You would hold him in your arms. There would be rapture: and a rapture all the swifter, because continued pain and longing had been.

Every Sunday afternoon, when Humphrey got red in the face and let his chin fall on his shirt-front, Amaza went off to early Evensong in the old Bloomsbury church where Jim-John had been baptized. She could hide herself in the high brown pew and cry if she wanted to. There were hardly any people there.

The service droned along. Through parted fingers, her eyes wet, her sight blurred, she watched the priest—a magpie man in white and black. He had held Jim-John in his arms; had conferred upon him some lovely magic. He had washed away from the little soul that stain of sin which she, his mother, had handed on.

She looked at it in this way, remembering all that Sebastien from a child had said. One loved the memory of Sebastien, yet did not wish to see him. The one person you did crave to see, the little child, he was gone and for ever. Then how could you possibly care about

other people? They were just fugitive shapes, more or less aggressive. Nothing more.

In this mood, therefore, one did not shrink from going abroad with Humphrey. He was no worse than any one else, and you owed him a duty. He was rather better than the rest. His open vulgarity was finer than genteel pretension. Even shopping with Cordelia became supportable.

Humphrey would be back to dinner soon. He had promised to be punctual, for it was almost their last night in the house.

People and things had been cleared up. They had gone down to Grainingfold and said good-bye to Marcia; then driven on to Mrs. Meeks and the Langfields. They had paid their respects to Lady Leith. She received them soporifically. You wouldn't see these people any more. It felt funny. It was rather like winding up your affairs in preparation for Death. Another country *was* Death.

As a final sundering, Mrs. Huckson had looked in after lunch this very day to say that she was called off to a sick sister in Worcestershire. There had been tears and lamentation on her side, a passive affection on Amaza's.

It was possible that Humphrey might bring some man home to dinner. He had done this lately. He had been in high, excellent spirits; responding to the prospect of a clean start, of a fresh life, which was to be bigger and coarser and less restricted in every way than the one he was leaving. He was like a boy getting ready for the holidays; or rather—a boy nearing his last term: meditating a razor, and a trial trip of love-making; dreaming of the noble acts of manhood.

He talked perpetually of the place to which they were going. It was a naked, baked, Jim-Johnless country, that he painted. Amaza would stare out at the misty Gardens, half-clothed with green. You had roots in the Square and it hurt to cut them.

He said to her that, here in the big house, they might as well be hospitable while they had the chance; and would she "buck up! there's a dear girl."

She had done her best. It was a good best; for Amaza

was haughty, with no heart upon her sleeve. Humphrey had been happy. He had given farewell parties to lots of people. He had been proud of his striking-looking wife. He had bragged a lot about the branch House, and all the more lustily because he knew (and knew that his guests knew) what a perfect hash he had made of things in the City.

This was Thursday. On Saturday they were going to Hampstead. To-morrow was Good Friday, and, according to Humphrey's ethics, a holiday.

"We ought to do something sporting to-morrow," he had said at breakfast. "The weather's lovely."

The bright sun was full on his face as he spoke. He had not looked so sleek and clear for years. A new country would be the making of Humphrey. Cordelia had said this. She was right. She always was.

"If you'd try to be jolly," he continued, staring at the quiet face behind the coffee-pot, "if you wouldn't mope so about poor Jim-John——"

"Jim-John!" Amaza was taken with an uncontrollable flood of agony. "Oh, Humphrey, can't you see his darling fat hands? They were mottled; with dimples where the knuckles were going to be."

"Yes, yes; poor little chap."

Humphrey wiped his mouth, with a flourish of the napkin. He pulled his face into the conventional droop of regret. He lumbered round the table and kissed Amaza and implored her to "pull herself together."

Thereupon, he had taken himself off as soon as he could. He felt aggrieved. It wasn't fair of her to make his life a constant misery. There was a nice air of holiday-making all over London. He wished to goodness they could have a day's motoring to-morrow. It would be deadly at home, and if he went to the club, no one would be there.

He went to the club now. He cherished it; for the last few days that he had left. He bragged so perpetually about the branch House, that members who didn't know him asked those who did, "Who is that bounder?" It was a big club, with a digestive maw. It had assimilated not only the Tamarind Tree, but other clubs.

Amaza, up in the nursery, dawdling with dead toys, heard him come in at seven to the minute. As for the toys, Cordelia had already annexed the rocking horse; Mrs. Tony Tuffle was making a clearance of the rest on Saturday.

You heard the front door bang. Humphrey always banged doors and banged them most when he was cheerfullest. You could gauge his mood by the thud of the door. Dear Humphrey! He was happy.

You heard him speak brutally to Turvey. He was always brutal to Turvey, and most brutal now; since he was going to a place where he would have fewer servants and less subservient.

Then he said to somebody else—

"If you don't mind just waiting a bit in there, I'll go and find the wife."

There was a certain deference in his voice. He had brought home a person of importance. Perhaps it was the ex-Lord Mayor who had stood sponsor to Jim-John. Amaza flushed. All her thought gravitated to Jim-John.

Humphrey came up-stairs two at a time yelling, "Amaza, where are you."

He knew perfectly well where she was and he hoped she'd come down. For already he was getting rather portly, and he didn't relish that extra flight of stairs. Still less did he care for the sad face and doleful reminiscence. She always met him this way. It was very selfish. Broken-hearted people are extremely selfish until they get used to things. Nothing is done—for yourself, for others—till you accept the sorrow; and give it no grudging welcome, but make it the honoured guest.

"I am here," she said, coming to the door. Soft candle-light fell behind her. Humphrey stared.

"By Jove!" he said, hugging and rumpling her, "you are good-looking. I've always known it, but sometimes I notice it more. Where did you get this thing?" He touched her filmy black frock. "Cordy didn't choose it, I'll wager."

"No,"—Amaza actually laughed—"Simone did. Who is down-stairs, Humphrey?"

"I came up to tell you." He shut the door and looked

embarrassed. "We mustn't stay gassing here long; he's waiting in the study."

"Who?"

"A man from the club. One of the Tamarind Tree lot."

"The Tamarind Tree!"

Amaza repeated the words, yet they did not shake her. It was all a long way off. Moreover, she and Humphrey were sailing far away soon. They were going to Cordelia the day after to-morrow.

"He came up and started jawing to me at the club after tea; a nice chap—I've known him a long time. I've mentioned him, but you wouldn't remember," said Humphrey, speaking quickly, then stopping and staring.

Not only did she not remember, but she wasn't even listening now.

"Wake up!" he said roughly. "We can't keep him cooling his heels down there, you know. I had to bring him; he wouldn't be shaken off. He came back with me; said he knew Bloomsbury; sentimental sort of fellow when he was young, so I should say. He stared at the houses in a funny way as we came round the Square."

He laughed. Amaza was listening now. She seemed extra intelligent. He stared quite casually into the eager, awful face. It was nothing of that to him—not yet!

"Is he a very old man?" she asked, and, picking up a woolly animal from the table, started aimlessly stroking it.

"Old—no! Getting on; well preserved, you know. Put that thing down and come along."

"In a minute. What is his name?"

"Wintle. I've mentioned him before. I was knocking about with him the night Jim-John died. I said so; but you wouldn't remember or take any notice at such a time. He's an entertaining old chap. You'll like him."

"You said he wasn't old." She spoke stiffly.

She let Humphrey pull her round the waist towards the door. She leaned hard at him. Jim-John's woolly animal fell at their feet.

"Oh, never mind that. Aren't you ready? He looked a hundred in the club to-day. He's awfully cut up;

an old friend of his has committed suicide; a man who lived in Jermyn Street. He went down in the country and married some parson's daughter he'd been in love with years before. Hanged himself behind the stable door two hours after the wedding. Queer yarn! He's full of it."

"Harrison! Did he hang himself?"

"Harrison? What d'ye mean?"

"I thought you said Harrison."

"I never said anything."

Humphrey spoke quite gently and in the way he would speak to her just before Jim-John was born. She had been funny then. She was more funny now. She never could stand much. She hadn't a strong brain, and the poor kid's death had shaken her balance. He must be careful with her.

"Come along down," he said. "We mustn't keep him waiting. He"—Humphrey laughed succulently—"is no end of a swell. Uncle to Lord Lanark, so he says, and other fellows tell me it is true."

Amaza moved away from him. She had her hand flat at the nursery wall. She tried to clutch it; her nails curved.

"Everything fails and goes away," she said confusedly.

She had said this more than once, and whenever she said it, Humphrey made the same aggrieved and deeply wounded answer—

"But I don't fail you, Amaza, come now. I'm here."

He made that answer. She turned to him.

"You don't fail. You are here," she answered, and clung to him again and humbly kissed his hand as he drew hers from the wall.

"Be nice, won't you?" Humphrey whispered, looking gay as they went down the broad stairs.

He was proud to entertain a baronet.

"Sir Walter Wintle," he whispered just outside the study door. "He would have been a noble lord if that narrow-chested Lanark had died when he was expected to."

Amaza nodded. She was flushed and beautiful. Humphrey had never seen her so disdainful, so regally holding herself. He was proud to-night; of his wife, of

his guest. What an impression the two would make upon each other—and the honours were his.

She fell back slightly, as he opened the door. He had to push rather than lead her in.

She was saying to herself under her breath—

"It wasn't me."

Sir Walter seeing her now, and after years, considered that she had barely changed. More beautiful and ripened, perhaps, more piquing and mysterious. He was instantly fired afresh. He could once more adore that manner which had, while he possessed it, so enraged him. Here was a woman for intrigue and not for daily use.

She gave him her hand. The cool hand, the cool smile and clear eyes delighted him. How clever she was! How excellently she had managed and would!

They all three went in to dinner when the Turvey of this time announced it. He was like the other Turvey of long ago. Wintle stared. These foreigners had the trick of melancholy, of looking more like a gentleman than most men. He was feeling all this without words, and feeling it bluntly—yet feeling. He had the cleverness of a dissolute man and the wide experience. His natural stupidity had been modified.

Nothing had changed—but one thing. The portrait of the red-haired woman no longer hung above the hearth. He felt a sense of relief at the omission. It had been of those queer portraits with eyes that seemed to follow you; and not only that, but to look you through and through. He was conscious of his inside Chamber of Horrors, and kept the door fast shut. He didn't often visit it himself.

Humphrey said, seeing him look at that space above the hearth—

"Looks a bit bare, doesn't it? My wife won't have anything else. A portrait of her mother was there, and her stepmother sold it by auction. I think"—his eyes questioned Amaza—"that the old cat got a long figure for it. You can tell, Sir Walter,"—he laughed as he sat down—"that we've rather got our knife in the wife's stepmother. The portrait was by a good man, and it wasn't hers to sell."

"Why did you let her sell it?" Wintle spoke pleasantly, turning to his hostess.

"I could not stop her," she returned simply, and shifted a branching candlestick, so that the light shouldn't get between her and him. He had been blinking at the little flames, and he turned to her now with a grateful gesture.

She certainly hadn't changed a bit. That pretty air of service! How like her! She was his Amaza. He resented Humphrey, with his constant brag. Confound the fellow! After dinner, one might perhaps be rid of him for a bit. A minute or two would suffice. He and Amaza must certainly meet, and untrammelled, somewhere, before she went abroad. Perhaps she wouldn't go abroad at all. Who knew?

He felt quite tender towards her; she hadn't done anything to irritate him yet. And she was uncommonly beautiful. This was a thing which he never could resist in any woman.

He never dreamed that she bore him any resentment for the past. Women did not. Things had turned out so well. Why should she be angry? They would be prudent again. He wasn't going to let this recovered prize slip through his fingers. She should save him now, just as she had saved him years before, from the arid plain of admitted old age. No other love affair had ever so rejuvenated him. She was most captivating. He forgot how he had hated her and longed to kick her; forgot that she had made a perfect savage of him.

He frugally ate his dinner; a good dinner; as it had been before. A good dinner and a handsome, well-appointed house! What a pity it was going to be picked to pieces. Let that overgrown puppy of a husband go abroad by himself. This sort of woman he revelled in—of milk-white skin and fire-red hair—was not for the raw Colonies.

Everything to-night was exactly as it had been on that other night. He looked at Amaza's black gown; so costly and simple. The only difference was Humphrey, sitting at the end of the table. He was a big difference.

There was something sinister in the likeness of this

night to that; yet Sir Walter hardly felt it. Men of his sort get blunted—to coincidence, to repetition; to signs and tokens; to everything but the bloodthirsty spirit of the chase. They cannot see the arresting spectre in the way. That had been the first night. This should be the last. Yet he hadn't an idea of what was coming. He was making his own plans for Amaza's undoing: the simple plans of the accomplished roué—so simple that nine times out of ten they succeed!

He watched her eat—bird-like, fragile!

Her lout of a husband slobbered something on his shirt-front and candidly mopped it with his napkin. He got redder and more voluble with each course. He wasn't drunk or nearly. He was just excited and restless, at the riotous prospect of the coming change in his life. He was looking forward to the voyage, to the new place and people. He never thought of her.

Wintle, quite chivalrous, in this mood, looked at him with open contempt: when it was safe; when nobody but the South German servant saw. Amaza marked the look, however. There was nothing that she missed to-night. He would answer for that look.

Humphrey kept saying—

"This is good," or, "I'll have another lot, please."

Delicately playing her fork, she smiled at him kindly and saw that he had enough. She couldn't surely be fond of the fellow?

Wintle, saying little, so that she should talk, listened. He endured this blithe bounder of a husband, for the sake of a stray word from her now and then. It had not changed, her talk. There were just the same ready quips and seeming contradictions; the same silly fooleries that to-night, after pause, you found so captivating.

She was cool, quaint, topsy-turvy. She was marvellous to meet—fascinating, maddening. She was the devil to live with. Yet—had she been? It amused him to hear her irritate and flummox this common Mallard fellow that she had married. He grinned discreetly when Humphrey grumbled more than once—

"You play tricks with everything I say, confound it, Amaza. Can't you understand plain English?"

She flushed at this. So she was still sensitive, still inordinately hurt by any roughness. Sir Walter remembered. He could even sympathize with Mallard; for it had been exasperating: her way of playing the fool—and so proving you to be one!

Humphrey meant to-night, his last as host in England (and to a baronet), to distinguish himself. Putting it in his own way, he had thought as he sat down, "I'll beat the big drum."

Amaza's instrument, more delicate, dulled his drumming nevertheless. He was very glad that she evidently liked Wintle and that Wintle liked her. But he wasn't going to be a numskull at his own table. She did that sort of thing too often, and he wouldn't stand it.

He talked as he chose, treading into the midst of her soft sentences; cutting her cranky fancies short. He imposed upon his guest a history of this house; where Amaza had been born, and her father and her son. He referred, pulling a face, to the death of the son. She flinched, and Wintle saw. So she was fond of babies. You didn't expect it in her sort of woman. But you never knew what to expect in Amaza. That had been her cursed charm, throughout.

See how pure she looked! How finely cut and transparent. You wouldn't think—anything; to look at her, to listen to her little babble. Humphrey was speaking now of his own business, and he was painting the branch House with a big brush. Distinguished commercial ancestry, unbroken business success; those were the things he wished to insist upon.

Amaza, in undertones, replied to Wintle when he spoke, smiled when he passed her things, met his devouring glance quite calmly.

Nothing ruffled her. She was a marvel. She would never be found at a loss. What a woman! Subtle, ingenious, astute. You could trust her. She was born for this sort of thing. She would never let herself down, nor you. She would always find a way out. She would pursue her path until the end. Yes, she was wonderful—and he had found her again!

She made him glad and young and ardent. She made

him forget poor Freke's suicide. That had been a horrid shock. It seemed so close and so the thing that you might do yourself some day when you'd had enough. It was the inevitable conclusion.

Amaza would keep you from being bored. She had bored him to death; but he chose to forget. He could forget any mortal thing while he wanted to. He did remember, however, that she had a way of infuriating a man, if he had too much of her. Well, then, you could make her cry. And that, in itself, would be an excitement.

The dinner was long; too long. He liked a good meal, but he liked the human hunt more. He was booted and spurred.

He ate very little and drank less. Humphrey—dirty plates taken away, fresh plates slid before him; his glasses filled with the suitable wine to the course, said—

"You and my wife are a pair, upon my word. Won't you have a go at a trifle, Wintle?"

Amaza at this said something absurd about a trifle, whipping up the word, in her way. Humphrey growled. She laughed and looked at Wintle. They liked each other. She was flirting with the old chap. Humphrey didn't mind. He was glad to see her so cheerful, since it would make things cheerful for him. Yet he wouldn't have her make fun of him to his face at his own table. And he was thinking how shallow women were. An hour ago she had been snivelling for little Jim-John. He got fonder of human Jim-John, now that she seemed to forget.

As for Amaza, sitting at the head of her table, on this, the last night (for to-morrow she would go into the country motoring with Humphrey; he wished it), Heaven alone knew what motley filled her heart. It was possessed; to overflowing, with a grimacing, jostling crowd: clamorous—yet she was cool.

The agony was, that pure mixed with impure. Wintle intruded himself upon Jim-John. This to a mother and one bereaved! Could you ever forgive that? The wrong to her, the wrong to Humphrey; these were nothing, by compare.

Yet one was cool; the time for fire, it would come. A

big fire, as we all know, the lasting fire, it takes time to start itself. She wouldn't have a silly bit of a crackle.

She looked at Wintle's lean, handsome face: just high curves and the cord of his muscles. Her eyes could hardly leave it. He noticed this and thrilled. How faithful women were! Why had he, to-day as he talked at the club with her husband, as he drove through the Bloomsbury streets with her husband, as he meditated on poor Freke, considered himself an old man and a spent man—fit for nothing but the well-oiled little bachelor *ménage* and the final petulant suicide!

He was still young; since a woman loved him. An exquisite woman too, and with nothing to gain by loving him. Nothing to gain and everything to lose! This was the test. He smiled into those earnest dark eyes. They smiled steadily back.

Amaza rioted in Imagination. Her brain was quick and turbid. Thoughts came that you had to cast out. They were the cloudy thoughts and memories that he had given. She had believed them dead—yes, and an even more than dead: just non-existent—a never had been. Yet to say to yourself, in that jubilant way, "It wasn't me, it wasn't me," became no longer possible when he was here and sitting close and smiling at you, and waiting for the chance to make love to you again.

Love! It was piteous! But she must keep cool for the present. Women killed men now and then; men of his sort, women of hers. She did not just know—yet—what she would do. The declared moment should decide. They must be alone. He did not long for it so ardently as she did.

He was a devil. He was perhaps the very Evil One. She had thought this before and sometimes she believed it. He had brought a dozen pocket devils with him to-night and let them loose. There they postured on the white cloth! See them leap from the table to the wall!

She felt all this; yet never had she looked more composed, nor smiled more quietly: a steady sweetness. Wintle cherished it.

She was thinking, "Well, if ever I am to go mad, it

will be to-night." Yet, throughout, there remained her triumphant sense of sanity and of a continued and an honourable life. Once get your heel on the neck of this dragon—returned—and all would be well.

What mystery we were, each to each and most to our own selves! She thought this. She could not say what it was that held her up to-night; kept her steady, provoked her to ease and the usual graceful badinage. She looked light and sounded tender. Her faint smile and ready tongue, her wistful way of watching, the challenge of her eyes—they were inevitable, a part of her, and would always be. Yet natural compassion was dead; melting and tenderness had departed. After dinner, things would be different. Wintle should then have no quarter. She did not know just what she would do or say when they were alone. She only had a confused sense that her passionate, revengeful mood would guide her. And she felt that Humphrey would be on her side. He was a husband, he was Jim-John's father; he was one's natural protector. She looked softly upon Humphrey as he bragged and became every moment more vulgar. Wintle, watching, could not understand.

All dinners are too long; this one was over at last.

Amaza, giving Humphrey ample time for everything, rose when the moment came. She was flushed.

"I must ask you to excuse me for a bit." Humphrey stared in rather a muddled way at his guest; lately, he was always stupid after an extra good meal. "I've got papers to sort; a dozen things to look into. If you'll go up to the drawing-room with the wife, I'll join you in an hour or so."

So it was that, all things repeating, Wintle once more walked up the broad old stairs behind Amaza. He listened rapturously to the vague swishing of her frock, and adored the careless twist of her flaming hair.

He opened the drawing-room door. She swept in, looked up, with a funny smile, giving him a queer look.

He was taken aback. Well! But why? Wasn't this a queer moment for them both? He followed her in and, quietly triumphant, shut the door.

She was standing by the little fire, her hand lightly on the shelf above. She looked superb, he thought; receptive. He came across the big room swiftly.

It was the old ardour, the well-worn smile. She, awaiting him, remembered.

CHAPTER XIV

THE DECLARED MOMENT

She was looking radiant; small wonder that he mistook. Her flashes of fun had played bo-peep all dinner-time before his delighted eyes. She was smiling now. She betrayed that delicious tantalizing manner of just waiting, of resting upon Opportunity.

She watched him. Mocking, bantering eyes! He thought, "How could she ever have made me savage? Why did I let her go?"

She was concentrated youth to any one; hers were the finest and most juvenile essences. He would not grow old; desire should be immortal. This in his quite common way he was feeling.

Amaza's theatrical senses were aflame; through the pause, as he came from the closed door to the hearth. This was Drama and it was delicious. She had twice known the same joy: when she stood on a bench in the Gardens out there, lecturing Humphrey and the other children on the inner meaning of the monkish book; and when, with Wintle himself as her guide, she had sat in the dissolute sawdust place, that night: the place that, even after Jim-John's birth, she had gone and looked for. Why had she gone to look? You were not meaning to forgive him that night—or anything! Meanwhile, there was plenty of time and Drama was thrilling. You pulled the strings of the world.

She felt no shame, hardly any penitence; but just molten rage and a shuddering hatred of this man and all his works. Hate ran through your body and was wine. She felt also an unbounding love for Humphrey. He would be sorry for one and understand. For he had been in the pit himself. Together, they had scrambled out. She remembered his early, hulking admissions.

They had been more silly than sinful. He would understand. He would love her more dearly. It would be a bond. The sun perhaps was rising over that new life of theirs in the Colonies. Call it Promised Land!

Sir Walter did not speak. He wished that she would. The coward in him asked that she should give the note to-night. A faint uneasiness, a twinge of suspicion, made him go and look through the half-parted curtains into the back drawing-room. It was littered with papers and already dismantled. There was a milliner's box upon the table addressed to Mrs. Humphrey Mallard. It seemed odd to think of Amaza as that. He almost felt as if a second woman intruded.

He wished she would speak. Her face was changing; it always did. There was surely something hard about those widely opened eyes? He was suspicious; by nature, by the necessities of the life he had led. And never could he quite understand her. Already the old irritation and contempt worked in him.

He had never seen a face that changed so. She had always been like that. Taking a last step, flinging a last careful glance round the stripped back drawing-room, he went up to her and held her hands. His manner said, "I'll kiss them, if you'll let me."

"Don't look so wild," he nearly whispered, "everything is safe."

She laughed. She pulled her hands away and clasped them behind her back.

"I'm not wild or mad; not depraved, dull or degenerate. Not any of the things my stepmother, in this very house, said that I was," she assured him unexpectedly.

"Of course not," he said, "of course not: " and shifted about on one foot and stared from the door to the windows. He distrusted her.

He went and looked through the curtains again; surveying the untidy back drawing-room and the milliner's box.

Amaza laughed; the pretty laugh—and yet the laugh that puzzled you. He had heard it a hundred times before. It had got on his nerves while she was with him. He had never once missed it when she left. Not

for a moment had he loved her or any one. Only himself.

"There's a most frightful hat in there," she said. "My sister-in-law chose it and thinks I'm going to wear it. But I'm going to drown it instead."

"Drown it?"

She nodded.

"As they drown kittens. You've all thought, every one of you, ever since I've been born, that you could manage me and pull me this way and kick me that. But you can't! you can't! you can't! I go my own way always, and I'm not mad, nor a drivelling fool, nor—anything of that sort."

She had not talked in this metallic, this most theatrical fashion before, not even on that day when news of Lanark's death came. He didn't like it. She was mad. One had always known that. Mad people were cunning; that was why she'd play her cards so well.

He pulled the curtains of the back room together.

"Don't talk too loudly. Don't get excited," he urged.

"I've been sane enough to keep my mouth shut," she said, and filled the room with that racking laugh.

This surely wasn't his Amaza! Such practical tones, such pitiless triumph, were not like her. He stayed by the curtains, fidgeting with them, pulling them close.

"You carried it all off beautifully. I congratulate you," he said—and wondered what she was driving at: and wished she would be soft and fond; compliant and timid: as in the old days. He'd rather have tears than this. He wanted to make some arrangement. One didn't mean to come into her life again, after all these years, and then just slide out of it.

"Come here!" He came and stood up close; his arms were held coaxingly out.

She slipped freakishly aside, leaving a space and leaving him the outstretched fool. She might have been silver water or a spook.

"If you come too close, I shall certainly choke you," she said calmly. "I could do it, and I don't care a bit."

Neither of them noticed the soft swinging of a door. Neither of them was destined to; that would have cut

across the neatly made path of Fate. For—since these things are inevitable and the way terrible secrets are made plain—Humphrey had come up to the back drawing-room for particular papers. He had stopped dead and given a queer, noiseless whistle; just pursing his mouth and failing at sound, when he saw the closely drawn curtains. Never, in their joint experience of housekeeping, had Amaza drawn them at all. They were wholly decorative; foreign things with gilt dragons sprawling on a blue ground. Humphrey stared. His mouth was suddenly dry, and he wouldn't have moved a step now or made a single sound for a king's ransom. Listening, all his blood at his head, as if it would burst, he heard Amaza say, with stupendous calmness—

"I shall certainly choke you. I could do it, and I don't care a bit."

He stood listening. The world may say that such mode of revelation is hackneyed, but it is not. The coincident is always with us; Amaza herself had said something very like this to Marcia long ago. Trouble begins when you try to create the coincident; this can never be. Try to meet a person (just by accident), try to revive some dramatic situation in your life (the life of which sometimes you are so weary!), and you won't. Try to learn a secret, just by listening and not a sound floats through the door. Look through keyholes, seeking revelation, and—cynically speaking (so it has been said!)—the point of a hat-pin has pierced the eye of Peeping Tom before now.

You may meet people, hear secrets, see wonders: but they will never be the people and the secrets and the sights that you've planned and longed for. Fate isn't going to have your mundane finger in her pie. The people will bore you, the secrets will not be your own; sight shall prove tedious.

So Humphrey, quite naturally, just as it was meant to be, stood listening. It was the most usual thing in the world.

There was intense silence, and you could imagine them staring at each other. Humphrey felt quite fanciful. It was a silence broken by the scroop of a foot—

Sir Walter's, as he hastily moved aside from this sudden virago, this constant, if intermittent, lunatic. There was declared madness in her now, if you like!

Humphrey heard the sound, and didn't know which one made it. He had not looked through the curtains yet. It wasn't time.

"When I was a little girl," Amaza said, and speaking in her confounded dreamy way (Humphrey and Sir Walter each put it so!)—"they whipped me and put me to bed because I didn't believe in hell. They whipped me, they fed me on dry bread for a whole day, they shut me in a dark room. They did it for the best and to save my soul. It was kindly meant; the hard things are. But I couldn't believe; it didn't seem that God could be so fierce. I believe to-night. I understand. These things are true; when you are strong enough to see them. God doesn't send you to hell; you choose to go yourself. You *will* go; although He holds you back in a hundred ways. I suppose hell is just a going out; just a being nothing at all, once you are dead. I don't know. That"—her voice lifted, and you felt that she lashed her listener with her furious eyes—"would be too good for you. It doesn't hurt—just a going to sleep."

"Come, come, come," said Sir Walter.

"I think of my life with you," the clear voice proceeded. "The things you said to me and showed me! The places you took me to! The part I played. The—thing that I was for a long time after."

She was crying now. This made both listeners savage, each on his own side of the curtain.

"I had no peace, no real peace, not for a single second, until my child was born. I used to pretend; I used to say that it couldn't have been me, that there truly wasn't any you. But it was only bluffing. There was the sting and the stain of it. The things that happened afterwards, the puddles I poked about in"—she laughed now—"the wickedness of it lies at your door. Oh! and I was so happy when Jim-John came to me! And I'm so wretched, for ever wretched, now he's dead. I wasn't worthy to keep my child. That is your fault. You were alive, and so he couldn't live. I wasn't a fool

when you took me away from this house. I was only very innocent. You can't understand that. I knew nothing at all. When I went away from you I knew everything that there was to know. You come back to-night, when I've prayed that you were dead. I persuaded myself that you must be. My child shouldn't breathe in the same world with you. You come back; you smile at me in the way I know. You feel so sure of me."

"Never mind all this rant. What was that noise in the next room?"

"Nothing. What noise could be there? Yes"—she now sounded quite merry—yet it was a merriment that you'd rather not—"it is rant, and I didn't know it was in me, this melodramatic sort of thing. It must lie at the bottom of every one of us—the what you call rant."

There had been a sound. Sir Walter heard it. Humphrey, choking with fury and shame, as near apoplexy as he would ever be in his life, broke his collar-stud as he caught at his throat: he was listening, clutching his throat; doing the things men do—the things that they love to deny that they do. There are handy stock sets sold by Fate—of speech and mien and gesture. We all supply ourselves; when the moment is strong enough.

Humphrey split the stud-hole of his collar, lost the stud, and, even now, had the masculine feeling and made the masculine sound of annoyance as at an actual misfortune. He had lost a stud.

"I think," said Sir Walter, with his silly air of dignity—the manner Amaza remembered and so despised—"that you've said about enough. I didn't come here to-night for private theatricals. I'll be off. Apologize for me to that refined husband of yours. I shall see him to-morrow, as usual, at the Tamarind Tree. I could say a good deal if I chose."

His voice came from the door. In a minute he'd be sneaking out. Humphrey, cursing thick and silent, behind the dragon-strewn curtains, swore that he should not.

"There isn't any more to say. I've said too much," Amaza returned. "Where are you off to? Why don't

you kill yourself as Harrison did? That was decent of him. I don't suppose the poor thing's name was really Harrison. It couldn't be; you always told me lies. I thought"—that delicious laugh of hers came slipping in—"that I might kill you myself. As we came upstairs after dinner I was wondering how I'd do it. But you've stained my soul so much that I'll keep my hands clean. God may have something good in store for me; something that is nothing to do with you, nor with Humphrey, nor any of the others. I don't know. I wish you'd go away."

Sir Walter wished it too, and here was the handle of the door in his hand, and there was that lout of a Mallard down below with his nose deep in documents! Then why not go?

He could not. Her queer charm held him; her very beauty drew him to her feet, and, slowly, feeling that he crawled and was contemptible—cursing her, yet deeply desiring—he returned to the hearth, where she stood.

The touch of fire in her, the touch of coarseness; these were what he had wanted in the past. She had denied him then; she was lavish now. He liked a woman of rough, open fabric: one who would approximate to the vices of a man and play with a toy sin. It was amusing to watch. There are many like him. In rustic parts, corrupt men who are born simple and to farming pursuit will make pigs and geese drunk on cider-washings—just to see the fun. Sir Walter was of that kind. He liked to see the fun, and—up till now—Amaza had always cheated him.

To-night he enjoyed seeing her writhe, knowing that she loathed him. She had not shamed him; she had rather hurt his dignity, nothing more. This she had done lots of times.

He came up to her and looked at her, and longed to pull her down into the dust again. He would shrink at nothing to accomplish that. She should pay dearly for her bit of plain speaking. It had amused him; yet it was bad taste.

He smiled. It was rather timid and indulgent. She made a savage gesture, and he said within himself—

"Now there will be some more fun. What will she say next?"

He was expectant and on his guard. Yet one really need not be afraid.

She was a willow of a woman, and could hurt no one bigger than a baby. Look at those frail, round wrists!

He dreaded nothing but physical force. She wouldn't make an open scene, for she was too wise. She was letting herself go; yet she kept her head, and a woman's tongue hurt no man. She meant, still, to be Mrs. Humphrey Mallard. Her rage spurred him on so that he privately said, "You shan't, then."

He'd have her for himself, once more; and for as long or as little as he chose. Then she might sample more puddles; as she'd done before on her own admission.

He watched her mouth. He wondered what she'd say. While he watched, he saw her head turn, saw her very softly smile, saw her lace her hands together and hold them at her breast. It was a beautiful little look and gesture: a bud looking up to the sun, a young child to its mother.

He turned his own head, to the curtains that hung between the front room and the back. A clown was looking through. He saw a red round face, patched chalky; saw a flying collar and upstanding tow hair; saw a funny moustache, brushed up on end. Poor Humphrey could only look comic in his pain. He certainly could not rise to the rapt, glad manner of Amaza.

He did not even seem to see her. He looked only at Wintle. He said to him in a laborious, bloodthirsty way—

"Can I have a word with you down-stairs?"

Sir Walter returned in his pleasant, well-bred-gentleman manner—

"With pleasure."

Neither of them spoke to her, flung her a last look, bestowed upon her the smallest notice.

Wintle, walking erect, looking dignified, clean-cut and handsome, went out through the door. He was jaunty and assured; yet you saw his skull through his drawn

flesh. He was already mummified. Humphrey's hot face disappeared from the curtain, and you heard him slip out through the back drawing-room door.

Nothing more.

Amaza remained, smiling, softly distraught, upon the rug.

* * * * * *

She was a trifle disconcerted; since Humphrey had not smiled back at her. She felt fonder of him than she ever had done before; fonder and more grateful. Yet his glum face was nothing to worry about. Wasn't it natural that he should wish first to deal with Wintle?

She was dreadfully tired. It was nearly eleven. The house remained quiet. No voices, no shutting of doors, no sounding of blows. It was possible that Humphrey would fight him. That would serve him right. Nothing was bad enough for him. After to-night, you would, at last, be able to quite forget that he had been. He was, of course, a devil.

She went up childishly and quite calmly to bed. It was lovely to feel that, for the future, there would be no hidden something between her and Humphrey, her husband.

She fell quite peacefully to sleep and at once. She did not wish to see Humphrey to-night; for she was tired to death, and—the dramatic mood still strong—she considered that you couldn't play two parts properly on one evening. It was not to be expected. She had rung down the curtain triumphantly upon Sir Walter. To-morrow she would play her part with Humphrey and be quite fresh.

As a sleepy, last lingering regret, quite faint and safe, she did wish that he'd smiled back, as he stared through the curtain. In the look she threw him there had been the expression of everything that she'd ever felt for him. It wasn't much; it was only gratitude. Yet it was the most she had to give. Not for her, at any time, was there to be the surpassing, sweeping love for one man, the thing most wonderful—that is woven into you, that you carry with you through all the Eternities—you and he: together. A sort of jumble of Jim-John and of

Sebastien in his red comforter, when he and she were children; that was the most she knew.

Yet you meant to be kind to Humphrey, and grateful to him for the rest of your days. This was, surely, married love.

Why, she did not know, she pondered upon it afterwards—in those days and nights when there was plenty of time, and for ever plenty—but she did not to-night, the last thing before lying down, go into the smaller room, leading through her own, where Jim-John had slept.

Always, until this night, she had gone in there and wept to the clean empty spaces and broken her heart afresh: the heart which, through the hustling events of each day, had healed a touch. In the days before the funeral when she sat stunned, they had taken the cot away.

Mrs. Tony Tuffle had done it, as Humphrey reminded her a dozen times, and in a valiant way, for her good. It was better for her not to see the cot.

She would have loved the little cot, and it was gone. To-night she did not even open the door of that room which they, meaning so well, had left so gaunt.

She got into bed and slept, and awoke in the morning, feeling smooth and light. It was nothing in the least like those awful wakings directly after Jim-John died.

As she did her hair, she looked in the glass and thought how nice she was. She had a fresh desire to see Humphrey at breakfast. He would not read the paper, for once in a way. They would talk. There would be clearness and a fast bond between them at last. She had always hated deceit. It had been an evil burden. And now—setting back her bare round shoulders, smiling in the glass, at her peaceful face and flowing hair—deceit was gone. The path was clear.

She went down singing; yes, actually singing. It was a wild sound. For the house seemed very quiet, and the first twitchings of a big fear seized her. Humphrey was so noisy as a rule; you could hear him bullying and blundering all over the place. Not a sound this morning.

The dining-room was empty, and on the table the distasteful presence of his empty coffee-cup. She sent it away, and set a jug of flowers in the place.

The room was dusty and depressing. Outside in the Square, painters were working and whistling. This was Good Friday, and the festival to many of the spring clean. Yet Tragedy and Poetry glide, mourning, through the streets.

It was certainly one of those days she most hated; an east wind, a bright sun. She supposed that when Humphrey came back and when they'd had their glad explanation (which would not take long), that he would wish to take her motoring. The dust along the Portsmouth road would be appalling; yet he would love it.

"I must swallow the dust and call it a philtre," she reflected, and smiled in a wavering way: verbal caprice had lost its charm.

You couldn't feel very glad, although the Future promised lots of things. The garish day, the cheerful whistling, Cockney voices outside, calling to each other from high ladders, how melancholy it all made you!

She sat alone at the table, not eating, just staring at the flowers in the place where Humphrey had been, just dreaming on the different qualities of sunshine—sorting them out in her head: sunshine, with earth, was so capricious, so many-sided—you couldn't cut a precious stone into more facets! There was sun through cloud and sun over the sea; sun through the bare winter trees and sun through May trees, as it filtered past a green blush of shy young leaves; sun through the breaking fog; the pallid winter sun; the bloodshot sun portending storm. And then people talked glibly of just sunshine—as if it were always the same!

Humphrey would be in soon. He would jovially bang successive doors; he would shout—

"It's a sunny day; a jolly cheerful day. Don't pull a long face. Get on your things and let's be off."

Somehow the prospect of a continued and a probably long life with Humphrey, and in a new country that stared you out of countenance, it was doleful. She wanted to cry.

He did not come. The painting and the whistling went on outside. She could see ladders set against the Tony Tuffles house. Mrs. Tony was for ever white-washing and painting; she was so brisk and bustling. You associated her with the spring-clean thwacking of carpets. One could imagine spiders, who are dark, fanciful souls, scuttling from her bright dwelling without the need of any broom.

Down-stairs, the servants were making a noise. They were out of hand. To-morrow they were leaving.

Open vulgarity had already set its seal upon this old house which was so dear. Amaza, all at once broken-hearted again, robbed of that flying gladness which sound sleep and the new morning had brought, imperiously rang the bell. Turvey appeared. She again questioned him about his master, and was again told that Humphrey had left the house early and had not said when he might be expected back. The South German, speaking in his experimental and most touching English, conveyed the fact that Humphrey had seemed perturbed. This meant that he had sworn himself black in the face. Now—why? She told the man to take the breakfast things away, and, walking to the window, she watched the sunshine and the flying dust.

She waited so, feeling limp, feeling curiously blank of mind and body, for a long while. Then she went up to the nursery. But Jim-John had gone away. She could not even cry, and she experienced the dry and hopeless sense of having lost your very Sorrow.

About noon the doors did bang at last, one after the other. Humphrey was heard cursing Turvey in the frankest way for something he had or had not done. Amaza hurried down-stairs—and all the time feeling, "Yes, but how can one love and live with a man who uses words like that?"

Mrs. Tony would have just laughed at the frank expletives. Had she been Humphrey's wife, she would have clapped a fat pink hand in front of his mouth. The whole thing would have been a good joke: a joke below stairs, a joke above—ethics alike. This makes for a flourishing domesticity and healthy flesh.

To Amaza, listening and suddenly trembling, each word was a hammer—and they broke up the fairy fabric of her fresh-woven romance for Humphrey. In this mood—of hers—they met upon the first-floor landing. When she saw him, however, she flung off distaste, and, regarding him quite as the ideal; as just protector and deliverer, she pulled at his hand, opened the drawing-room door and pushed him in. He hadn't any volition of his own, apparently. He was covered with dust. He was of greys and clays; clothing and flesh.

Amaza shut the door, and they stood in the big room; quiet, alone, just together. Outside, was the blare of the sun and the jokes of the painters.

Impulsively, with a rush of arms, with a whirl of broken words, she rushed to him—her husband. Heaven knows why, but she felt through that moment, her first and last hint of passion for him. He was hers, wasn't he? And Jim-John was their child. This in a candid way—quite unusual—she was feeling.

"Humphrey," she breathed, in a lovely way: and added, "Humphrey!"

He was dull, at all time, to any cadence—and he was stone dead now!

He stared at her, with those stupid blue eyes set in a grimy face; a face from which the high colour had gone. Then he gave her a violent push, and she fell crooked on the next chair. His fist hurt her chest, and it ached.

He said, making a hideous grimace, a something meant as replica of her smiling tenderness—

"I shall choke you. I could if I liked, and I don't care a damn."

CHAPTER XV

THE UNTRAMMELLED WAY

He said other things: words that she'd heard from him before; words that she knew too bitterly well—and not from his lips; words that were new.

She sat, solemn and soft, puckering her brows, holding her hand fast at her chest, where it hurt horribly.

Through his floods of language you discerned his pain—this was his rough way of showing his suffering. It was the only way he knew. You felt that he might leave off swearing and just frankly blubber at any moment. That would be like him, and it would be his uncouth way.

She longed to rise and enfold him in arms that were invincibly tender. She had never loved him more; nor been more helpless and pitiful. She felt as if she were his mother and as if he had cut himself; some hideous wound that turned you sick; that he would not let you dress. She did not resent the words he said to her and of her, although they were not true; no, never—not one.

She could only sit and stare; not daring to move; waiting for him to run down.

She could forgive him all the words; yet she could not forgive him that mouthing, monkey grimace. It seemed far worse than anything that she had ever done.

At last, to her joy, he left off swearing; wound up his string of silly profanities, composed his features, and said something that was sense, something that, at least, you might hope to answer.

"If I could have got at you I'd have wrung your neck in the night," he said. "But you'd locked the door. You're a fool, but not the sort of fool we think you are."

This was one of the truest things he'd ever said. And you remembered that he had wrung the necks of young

cockerels for Marcia years ago; begged for the job, delighted in it.

"Did I lock the door? Oh yes; and then I forgot to unlock it. How funny! I've never forgotten before."

"Funny!" shrieked Humphrey, and started swearing again.

You could only wait until he finished. Amaza drew her hand from her chest and clasped it with the other in her lap. She had her back to the light, but the sun was full on him and he looked frightful. Also, she wished he wouldn't shout so, since they still had servants.

She watched him and waited. She thought her own thoughts, as always. This furious man with the foul tongue was curiously distant and unreal. She realized fully—and it was an enormous relief, a joyful revelation—that the bodily bond is nothing; and an even less than nothing. Remembering this, you could dismiss Sir Walter Wintle also: you could deny the existence of every puddle you'd explored.

The looking and the searching of all her life, what had it been but the mistaken quest for God? With God is the goal of all romance. Whether you found Him through and with earthly Love, or through the magic and the marvel of Nature, or through the search into your own soul—what difference! You kept on looking and, at last, He was there. She felt curiously glad.

"I've been rushing about since the morning. I hired a motor," Humphrey said, again sane, again comparatively clean of the lip. "I went to Marcia. I looked up at those blooming woods where I proposed to you and where I believed in you. I wanted to set fire to the lot instead of whizzing by. Yes,"—he glared—"and I'd have pitched you into the middle of it with pleasure. Marcia could only mouth and make eyes and be shocked. I don't wonder. I motored on to your stepmother, and caught her on the hop. They're off to Biarritz. I went to Cordy on the way back. I kicked up the dust, I can tell you. I left the lot in hysterics. I told them everything that Wintle told me. They couldn't tell me anything!"

"How could they tell you anything?"

"Then who the devil can? You won't," sobbed Humphrey and sat down.

Dust fell from him; his enormous boots were an assault upon the carpet. Was that a tear making its channel down the dusty plain of his cheek? Amaza's imagination could rise to anything. This was the most ghastly moment of her life. Humphrey was suffering and through her. She could not heal him nor stop him. He looked up, haggard, bloodshot and threatening. He kept gulping and licking his lips.

"I must have a drink," he said sullenly.

She rang the bell, and when the tray came she met it at the door and carried it into the room herself.

"Wintle was here till twelve last night," he said, drinking whisky nearly neat, and sounding to Amaza's stupefaction almost friendly towards Wintle.

"You've been an abandoned character all your life; that's clear. The old girl said that to me down at her place to-day. Her words, not mine. She said you were the very devil even as a kid. Hang it all, you led the man on and then you left him. You played off your innocent airs on him, as you have on me."

Amaza sat listening. Here was Humphrey, her husband, unrolling to plain vision the awful story of her life; the life long forgotten, ignored, denied. She had never known him so fast and so fluent. He kept saying, as he filled his glass, as he snuffled and drank and stared, "Wintle told me—this"; or, "Wintle told me—that."

He seemed insensibly to side with Wintle. She heard it all; the things she knew, the side of herself which she had denied, which she had lost, which she had starved out. What a sickening feast of husks he spread! And the recital, from his lip, gained in grossness. His instinct was to over-interpret.

"Then you went off. That was a year before you met Marcia. I've figured it out. You can't deceive me."

"It was more than a year."

"Was it? That's kind—to tell the truth, for once. Well, what were you doing? That's what I'm here to know. Out with it."

The words were divided. In happy moments, Humphrey fell upon slang; in wretched ones, on swearing.

He was ineffably wretched now. Every respectable instinct he had was assaulted. He was hurt and shamed to death—for as long as it lasted. But he would throw it all off directly he set sail for a new country. With him, to shift his body was to renew his spirit.

His pride, his self-respect, his prosperous complacency —where were they? There was a strong strain of highly respectable prig in Humphrey. It ran in his commercial blood. It was the thing which had made him attend the Unitarian chapel, although only for a little while. The same instinct had made his father, the elder Mallard, sit at City dinners, head subscriptions—lend his name and loosen his purse to any good work that was advertised enough. Humphrey would have become all this in time; but for the wild drop in him of natural colonist and hunter. Wally was the perfect, unleavened specimen of the family temper, and he had died. Amaza sat and stared; she nearly smiled. Whether you smiled or cried was just accidental; decision rested with your muscles. "If she grins, I'll knock her silly," thought Humphrey.

"Speak, can't you," he stormed. "Wintle told me everything he knew——"

"Yes. But he couldn't tell you everything."

Her apparent calm as she said this, made him more than ever beside himself. Up to the very last, he was to be oppressed by her "superior" airs.

"I'll kill you, if you don't look out," he said, lifting the glass and glaring over the top of it.

He would do nothing of the kind. Some men talk so glibly of killing themselves, of killing you: abundant word destroys the act. Humphrey stood up, the glass empty. In a minute he would fill it again. The room was already sick with a whisky smell.

He looked such a big fellow; reckless, dirty, threatening. He was just a wild, unkempt animal. Amaza knew he wouldn't kill her. His anger was glittering, weighty, terrifying to look upon. Yet no more. He was fight-

ing clumsily with unwieldy weapons; just whirling them round your head and never hitting.

She rather wished he would kill her; if it could be short and clean. For, really, what was there to live for? What had there ever been? Every joy was fugitive. You hadn't found the right thing yet. Those experimental joys, that you'd tasted while searching—and spat so quickly out, finding them bitter—they were so vile, as brewed afresh by Humphrey, as viewed through the mists of serener years, that she felt she could never be purged of them. You dared not live; yet to die meant being driven forth from purer worlds for which, as yet, you were not fit.

"Are you going to tell me?" raved Humphrey. "Come on. There are plenty of plain Bible words. I could mention one or two."

"Bible words!" She shivered. "Yes, you have already mentioned several."

"All right. Then you can go on with a few more. You've given yourself airs. You've gone to church. Spout the Bible and find the words. I'll have the truth out of you. Nobody else can tell me."

"I don't know what is truth and what is lies," Amaza returned confusedly, and her eyes looked decidedly weird in her white, white face.

Humphrey thought, just for a second.

"Is she mad? Has she been mad all along?"

Yet that made no difference to morality and a man's wife.

He gave himself some more whisky.

Amaza was not mad; nor was she playing with him and parrying. He stood considering these three possibilities. She sat wearily cudgelling her brains. She shut her eyes and saw all the faces: faces of people whose presence she had just passed through; whose souls had left no manner of impress upon hers.

She could not remember—clear. Some stream washed right over her through this interview with this gross man who was a husband. The mood of "it wasn't me, it wasn't me," rose triumphant; steadied your heart and clarified it. What were these bodily things after all?

Transient, brief, to be forgotten. They might be used later, as tools for the graving of your uncut soul. That was not yet. The blinding half-truths of eternal things possessed her. She stood upon the last threshold before you enter in. She looked muddled and rapt.

"If I get a smut upon my face and wash it off at once" (she smiled and seemed almost gay), "what is that to any one?"

That little laugh of hers—and now! How could she?

"You don't want me to save the dirty water," she concluded. "And if I wash my face—hard—it may be even cleaner than it was before."

Humphrey very naturally cursed and confounded all this; still towering over her, still declaring with simple vehemence that he wanted the naked truth and would have it.

"You can't have it. It's gone, it's gone. I've forgotten. I did go looking about for a long time; there were lots of places and people. That is true. But it—it's just run through my fingers."

She spread them. Odd as it sounded, she was sincere. That dream of a life—that nightmare—how jostled it was; how unreal and contradictory! You didn't trouble daylight people with such a jumble.

"Stop that blither. It doesn't take me in. I heard what you said to Wintle, and I know what Wintle said to me. You don't deny that——"

"I don't deny anything;" she spoke quickly, shrinking from the things he'd be sure to say; "but I don't remember very much. I've tried so hard to forget. I've pretended until it's come true. Can't you see? And even if I did remember, how would that help?"

He looked at her and he listened. She was the biggest hypocrite on earth. She talked like a baby. She looked like a school-girl. Those women were the worst. He'd heard that. Wintle had said much the same thing last night. He wasn't very angry with Wintle; he was too savage with Amaza for any little side-shows of minor feeling.

"You ought to have told me. If you'd told me, I'd have married you just the same."

This was certainly not true; yet he believed it was: rather, it occurred to him as being the proper thing to say. Therefore, he did not stop to think.

"How could I tell you?" Amaza stared. "Don't you remember the things you told me? You were so disgusted and sad with yourself. You believed in me. You said I was an angel and a saint. Well then, I tried to be for your sake. I had to be, or it would have been profane."

Her fingers, as she spoke, still stuck out; the spread fan—and she moved it meditatively.

Humphrey struck her hands into her lap again and shouted, "Tell me the truth. You're my wife and it's my business to know."

Amaza, beginning to sob (partly pain of heart, partly pain of bosom and fingers), cried, with a sudden passionate burst of feeling, "Oh, can't you feel horribly sorry for me? And isn't that enough?"

"Sorry! Well, I'm—I'm blowed."

"Can't you forgive me? I would forgive you. I did. There were the shameful things you hinted at before we were married; the things you told me outright afterwards. I hated them. More than all, I hated you for telling; for taking a certain pride in it all."

"You're a nice one, I must say, to forgive! And a nice one to put on all these airs!" He walked away to the window; he turned back and, grimacing again, added, "A nice one, a nice one, upon my word. To turn up your pious eyes at a good story and make a man feel a beast; as you've been doing all these years. A nice one, a nice one!" His eyes and mouth worked, his nose wriggled about. He was only a monkey. What did you owe a thing like that?

He continued, broken-hearted—in his way—

"If it had been any one else I wouldn't have minded so much. If it was some blackmailing brute that I could pay off or give a good hiding to. But a member of my club!"

He sounded comic and pompous. He never had much humour; and it needs a great gift to let it flow over into your times of pain.

He was with Sir Walter Wintle here. There were certain things that both of them, common heritage of common men, carried through every mood. Respect of the Club was one.

"But we are going abroad. What is the club to you now, Humphrey?"

"Going abroad! Are we indeed? I like that."

Amaza hoped she wouldn't hear just such another laugh for the rest of her life.

"You don't suppose I'm going to take you out with me to the branch House? A new country, a clean start, and you up to your old tricks. No, thanks! You may go to——"

"Yes, yes." She made a brief, petulant gesture, looking ineffably sad. "Other people have recommended the same route."

Humphrey stared. She could talk like that now? She was shallow-pated, crack-pated. She hadn't any natural feeling. Just compare her to a warm-hearted little beggar like Mrs. Tony Tuffle over the way.

"Cordy won't let you darken her doors, either. Marcia feels the same. They are respectable women. The old girl said she'd pray for you, and that was all."

"What old girl?"

Amaza had really forgotten. You couldn't keep pace with his slang at the best of times. This was one of those times when you play a part that is outside yourself; when you say, feel, and do things that, later on, astound you. She would look back to this last hour with Humphrey and marvel at herself. In many ways, it was an hour of most merciful oblivion.

"Mrs. Meeks!" he explained, again making faces and mincing: every time he did this, Amaza felt no pity for him, and her soul rose in some strange open revolt at any tie with him—past, present, or to be.

"Take you!"—he returned to this. "Not if I know it."

So the cords were cut. You would feel numb at first, until the blood took once more to flowing, but nothing more. You were free. It was stupendous. She had always inwardly rebelled at being possessed by any one; had always felt that possession was only a seeming; that,

widely speaking, any such thing between soul and soul was a frank impossibility. She knew now how deeply she had hated the idea of a new country; and hated Cordelia and barely tolerated Humphrey. Yet she had been sorry for him and grateful to him. She would be pitiful and profoundly grateful still if he would only let her alone and leave her.

"I never wish to see your face again," he vowed, staring at it. "Get out, can't you?"

He made a rough movement of dismissal.

Amaza stood up, looking stupid and quite at sea. To be free was all very well; it was beautiful—but where should one stream forth to? There was this to be thought of. You were not living upon some abstract, unchanging plane, you were just a soul and body (for the most part, body, as yet). You wanted food and shelter, a settled scheme of life.

She had been wife and mother, she had cherished the nest. It was not with her now as it had been when, in open disgust, in hideous disillusionment, she had left Sir Walter Wintle.

There was nowhere to go, nothing to do, no one to care.

"I'd better go out and kill myself," she said simply, and looking round the lofty old beautiful room which had known her so long, which soon was to know her nevermore.

"That's right. Go out and kill yourself. Make a beastly newspaper scandal," sneered Humphrey. "Don't bother to think of anybody else."

He didn't care a rap what she did.

"It's about the best thing you can do," he added.

"Yes,"—she appeared to ponder—"there isn't anything else, for"—the wild tears spouted—"Jim-John is dead."

A cloud, of decencies, of restraints, enveloped Humphrey at this. It soon rolled away.

"Poor little chap!" he said, looking shocked and savage. "You may thank God he is dead. He was taken away from you on purpose. Cordy said so to-day. So did Marcia. All good women feel the same."

Amaza stood still and smiled: very slowly, as if the thought took a long time to come.

"It must have been queer to hear you three talk of God, when you don't believe in Him," she said.

While Humphrey, his eyes bulging (for hadn't Cordy and Marcia married parsons?), still stared, she added, with soft and certainly cracked inspiration—

"I shall go out and commit suicide."

Humphrey gave her his hearty permission to do as she pleased.

You couldn't get at him while he swore so. If only he would leave off; if only he would relent and if he would listen, then there might be hope: not hope of any happiness—how could you be happy with him or he with you—but hope of some repair, in a new place, amidst new people.

Yet! Did one wish it? Hadn't Jim-John been their only link?

"I will go to the river," she said quite calmly, and walked to the door.

Humphrey neither spoke nor turned round. He was staring out across the Square, watching a man go up a ladder, outside the Tony Tuffles's.

"If that chap don't look out, he'll break his blooming neck," he was thinking.

This excitement completely absorbed him for the moment. When he turned round and looked about him, he was alone.

His head felt big; bigger than the room.

"Blest if I don't think my nose is going to bleed," he said.

A public school, a polite training, the life advantage of money and an assured social station, made no difference to Humphrey. He would be a slangy great rough school-boy to the last. His brain had stopped short at a certain point.

He brought out his handkerchief in a hurry. The fear was unfounded. His nose did not bleed. Yet he felt queerly hot and large. He opened the window and looked out. The chap was still going up the ladder and going very unsteadily. There might be an accident at any moment. He felt sporting and most anxious. He wanted to shout, "Hi, there! Hold on——"

He wasn't quite sure whether he did shout or not. Nobody took any notice—so he couldn't have done!

He stood at the open window and stared down at the Gardens. He put his handkerchief away, muttering, "No, it isn't."

When he was a boy his nose used to bleed, and his mother would slip a cold key down his back. The very thought of his mother made him sentimental and a pessimist.

"I wish I'd never been born," he groaned.

For wasn't there a general muddle of things? His life was in a regular mess and not through any fault of his.

They used to hustle him out from the Gardens when his nose bled and hurry him home. He remembered perfectly well and those days did not seem true. Amaza had stood watching, looking so sympathetic. She had cried once and Nurse Huckson had shaken her. Nurses and children inclined to the theory that Amaza, almost a baby then, was "touched."

"It's a rum start, anyhow," groaned Humphrey.

He stuck his head farther out of the window. Air made him feel fresh and small. His head didn't whizz so.

What a nice dry day it was! How rough on him that he should have the hump when other people were off on a holiday! And—he stared at the ladders and the Tony Tuffles's—what a lucky beggar Tony was! There was a wife if you like! And five jolly little kids too! He felt almost angry with Jim-John for letting himself get killed. But it didn't matter. Jim-John belonged to Amaza. It was just as well that he'd got out of the way. You'd only hate him.

Humphrey felt stripped and ashamed. He felt—this he thought of himself and considered very neat—as if he'd been bathing and some one had stolen his clothes.

He stood staring out of the window and remembering the things that Wintle had told him, relishing yet revolting from them; enlarging and speculating.

"Horrible things! I could hardly believe my ears," he had said to Amaza—and he said it to himself now.

Yet she had not denied anything: and that woman was his wife!

Then there were the other things; which Wintle did not know, which Amaza professed not to remember. Humphrey wondered—*what*. He wished she'd told him. He felt it was his due. The whole thing was hard. He'd half a mind to blow his brains out. He shut the window, and going into the middle of the room, stood there softly whistling a stave of a music-hall song. House painters whistled it over the way. Maudlin tears ran down his dirty face.

He walked across to the bell and rang it savagely. He told Turvey to tell the cook that he'd have something to eat and have it hot and in double quick time.

When the food was served, he descended to the dining-room and ate with fury. As he went down-stairs, he had looked at household things on the way and wondered what they would fetch. He wished it was all over. The sooner he got out of the confounded place, the sooner he was out on the open sea, the better. He'd sail to-morrow if he could. He wished he could. For he daren't show his face anywhere; he—he hadn't any clothes on! He sniggered as he thought of this again. It was a neat thought and all his own.

He couldn't put his nose inside the club. He wasn't going over to say good-bye to the Tony Tuffles, not he. It would "bust him up." He couldn't bear the thought of going down to Cordelia. The memory of her prim "I told you so's" and "It doesn't surprise me's" made him sick. The thought of the Rev. James with his fulsome platitudes made him sicker. Cordelia's husband had already expressed his desire to redeem Amaza: yet the process must be carried out in some far place and at a safe distance from his own pure family life. He had been roughly told to keep his oar out of another man's boat. Humphrey, with the usual plain citizen, had no use for a religion which was moral without being mystical.

He sat down now and fed with fury. He worked himself off on his food. He sent Turvey away and gobbled as he liked. He didn't want the restraint of

that smirking foreigner behind his chair. He wanted to sop his bread in the gravy if he chose. He sat there cutting into the steak as if he'd killed it and cooked it. He put his elbows on the table, he smacked his lips and spilled things. It was a glorious unloosening. For years Amaza had controlled him at meal-times by her smiling, wordless air of disgust.

He'd see Amaza hanged before he took her to the branch House. He wasn't in any brief and perfectly natural revolt against her because she had deceived him, because she was not wholly his and never had been. That attitude may be just prelude to forgiveness. It was more than that. He didn't mean to forgive her, and didn't want to. He'd had enough of her; that was about the bottom of it. He owned this, as he swallowed the juicy steak.

She had (he returned to this over and over again) played him a dirty trick. That was a thing he never forgot. Whether it was a bootblack or your wife, it made no difference. He just put Amaza away, tore her off—as one of the things he did not want any more.

He'd have to send her money, since he'd spent hers. That was only decent, and it could be done through a lawyer. But if she got up to any more tricks he'd divorce her as soon as look at her. It might be well to have an eye kept on her by one of these detective chaps. He meditated upon this. It was rough that a fellow's life should be ruined at thirty-five. He'd divorce her if he got the chance, and a jolly good riddance too. As he rang for Turvey and the sweet, he wondered if there were any Mrs. Tony Tuffley women abroad. That was the sort for him: something cheerful and straight.

How glad he'd be to get out of England. Patriotism and all that rot was a fraud. Give him something new and big and free.

If the branch House proved too much of a bother, hanged if he wouldn't chuck up the whole concern, realize all he could get, and retire out of civilized sight with a gun. Not to kill himself. He wasn't such a fool. His head was clearer and smaller and more steady now. A decent lunch did wonders. Up-stairs, he had

thought it was going to burst. He wasn't going to kill himself, not he. He sat eating dainty little puddings, that were golden and white and green—just a spring meadow ready for cutting. He speculated on the blood-red joy of the hunter.

As to killing yourself—of course Amaza wouldn't do that. Not she. He fidgeted in his chair, he looked at the clock. Twice he went and listened hard at the door. He only heard the servants down below. Above him brooded the stillness of night.

He went back to the table. He rang the bell and demanded cheese. Coffee could come at the same time. He didn't want to be disturbed; and would they kindly moderate that "confounded row" down-stairs. It was disgraceful.

The coffee sobered him. He sat thinking. Wintle was a scoundrel; this became more clear. He wanted kicking, he deserved to be shot. But Wintle wasn't the only one. That was the rub. He had been sold, all through. He had been bamfoozled. Amaza was as artful as the devil. Let her go and drown herself.

He drank his coffee to its last dribble. He smoked a good cigar. Then he went and listened at the open door again. There was unruffled silence now; up-stairs and down. All he could hear was the confused, warm bustle of the sun-lit Square outside: now and then the "honk-honk" of a motor-car.

Amaza, no doubt, was crying herself blind in her bedroom. Women did that and men got drunk.

CHAPTER XVI

THESE THINGS ARE SETTLED

Amaza went softly up to her bedroom and put on her things. This was the second departure—of final determination—from this house. There had been a third time of departure, and in another place; in the gimcrack, garish block of flats when she had left Sir Walter Wintle. But that time did not belong. That was another woman; desperate, sinful, quite distraught. You felt sorry for her. You felt sorry partly because no one else cared (as Humphrey would have said) "a damn" for her.

She was already a long way off from Humphrey, as she was a long way off from Wintle. Distances were about equal. To her imagination, the two men seemed to pass along a dark road, arm in arm, quite friendly; cracking jokes and swearing. One was rough, the other polished; yet they were the same. They went along the road; they got smaller, they sounded less; you weren't bothered by their words and gestures. They would be round the corner in a minute; round the corner of that strange road which led to—where?

She pinned on her hat and slipped into her coat. She chose a scarf and gloves; nice ones. She did everything deftly and with despatch, hardly feeling anything. The mood was too deep, the hurt too permanent, for anything of extra sound or unusual movement. When she was ready, she looked all round the room; heavy as it was with every memory. Then she looked into the smaller room. There was no cot, as there should have been. Yet round dark heads and rosy faces—they were many. They laughingly followed her eyes, wherever she looked. Jim-John had been so roguish, such a hearty fat boy.

Then she went to the nursery, where, still, there were tokens of her dear one love and little idol.

Toys about, just waiting for Mrs. Tony Tuffle; bits of paper torn from the wall, where naughty fingers had picked busily away on dull days. She took up a toy; some degraded home-made dolly who had been extra precious. It was lying on the window-seat, just as he'd put it down. They had not devastated this room yet; she had forbidden that. Mrs. Tony would be here to-morrow; the auctioneer's men on Tuesday. That would be time enough. Everything tangible was sliding by you, and the next scene—where would that come from, and what was it meaning to show!

She held the doll. She didn't clutch at it, or cry over it, or cover its comic face with kisses. These are the things you do at first, and before you've truly plumbed your Grief. There are depths beyond mere weeping: for weeping strikes the note of Hope. You weep before you fully realize. Amaza had no hope whatever now.

She held the doll; looking cold, looking vague. The thing was quite limp in her hands. This was defrauded touch and true agony. Soon she ceased to look at it, soon dropped it to the floor. Yet she was feeling for Jim-John a something more passionate than kisses, more deep than tears. Nothing could heal her, but the touch and sight and sound of him: that would be nevermore. Standing silent, unmoving; in that mood and manner of supremest pain which, to all seeming, is so ultra-cold, she remained for some minutes. Humphrey, going down-stairs, speaking to Turvey at the dining-room door, before he slammed it, roused her.

She went round this most precious room once, just childishly patting the walls. Then, smiling, stupid, she descended and slipped softly out of the house, for ever, while Humphrey was slobbering soup. As she went by the window she saw the back of his head. It was bent right over the plate, and it was the head of a perfect stranger. You often, through windows, saw people eating, didn't you?

The curious thing was that when you went off like this, when you cut the last cord that bound you and rose —or fell—from the mooring place, there was never any one to stop you. Amaza considered this as she walked

aimlessly up Woburn Place past Mrs. Huckson's and saw the boarders feeding. Mrs. Huckson was in Worcestershire. There wasn't a soul to stop you; not, of course, that you meant to be stopped. There was no one to whom you could go—except, perhaps, to Sebastien. But he belonged to the curious ideal state; he hardly counted. To reach Sebastien you'd have to float upon clouds or descend, mermaid-wise, through salt green waters. This wasn't a fanciful hour.

She was going north, which was not the way to the river. Half-way up Woburn Place one remembered this, and turned back, in time. Yet there wasn't any hurry; for the river was always ready.

As she went down Southampton Row, she looked about her sharply; noting things, loving them, bidding them good-bye. She loved the hidden spots more than the apparent fabric. You couldn't love the Tony Tuffles's house; yet you could respond to the old haunted place as it had been. And of course the Caretaker was there still; lurking somewhere even below the kitchens. Again, here was the Shorthand School! Amaza's vision reared a smaller and a more sedate building in its place. She saw the silver-haired fiddler of years and years ago. That fervour of the man and the fiddle! Where was it? What did it mean? Was he fiddling somewhere still? There must be some answer to all the aching questions which the fiddle and the man between them had asked. These things couldn't be wasted.

She went straight south to the Embankment. To commit suicide, you, of course, went to the Thames. That must be one reason why it was there. She walked with grave, childish memories of a book of poetry, in the study at home. It was brown-bound and smelt most beautiful, the book. She used to go and read it; reading and smelling by turn, until Nurse Huckson houked her out; to wash her face, to take her for a walk; to put on a clean frock—or to do something equally unpleasant. Some one in the book had drowned herself; the circumstances had been rather alike.

"I will drown myself too," said Amaza, stepping out, staring at the people as they passed. People were always

interesting, although, as a general rule, they were remarkably ugly.

They were worse than ever to-day; for they wore holiday clothes, and the constant sun was in a crass mood as it shone upon them.

Yellow sun, blue sky, and, when she at last got to the river, green grass in the Embankment Gardens.

She sat down on a seat with her back to it all, and her face to the river. You must get to know the river. Other people came and sat there too; the day was shining and dusty. It was nice to sit out of doors. Several said so in her hearing: weary-faced women in dreadful holiday fineries.

They sat down. They crowded her along to the end of the seat. They looked hard at her. You couldn't hope to do anything with yourself while they sat staring. You might have to wait until dark. That was probable.

Amaza shrank from the grubby babies that they joggled; automatically moving them about in the perambulators or dancing them up and down on the seat, quite close to one. Why should she want to cry? Why did she feel this awful oppression at the throat and eyes? Why did she long—to madness, to recklessness—to snatch each dirty little thing away from its mother and crush it in her arms until it couldn't breathe? This must be madness; for there had only been one Jim-John in all the world.

He was in heaven. When you'd taken the plunge and jumped, so to say, clean through the cold river, you would kiss him again. Surely this would be so, since God was kind? Yet you debated and were afraid.

She got up and walked about. The women's eyes followed her.

She was beautifully dressed. She had a wild, wild face.

"Shouldn't wonder if she's escaped," said one.

Yet they really did not mean the madhouse. They hardly knew what they meant. They were just human, and were women and mothers. By this common link, they knew more than they knew. Escape was the only word to use.

Amaza sat down again, and this time on an empty

bench. Before long a beggar came and sat there too. Sunshine and sharp wind drifted through his rags. People would not leave you alone. This was the lesson you were evidently meant to learn; yet her passionate individualism resented it. However! Nothing mattered; since one was leaving the world for good: and before it got dark, if possible.

She was never alone. Companions proved fugitive on every seat. Holiday groups jostled between you and the parapet all the time. The very river seemed to placidly grin, and say, "You shan't do it."

She was getting very impatient. Yet her decision never wavered, and, beyond all, one was certainly not mad. This was the sanest thing in the world, the thing she proposed. It was the only thing left to do.

There were people, there was traffic, somewhere there was a band, and presently she watched the Salvation Army go drumming and trumpeting by. Some people laughed at this, some looked serious. Some, as you could see, were exchanging the usual heavy platitude. Amaza was sharp. She noticed everything. This was natural; since you were soon going away from the world. Moreover, you had been here some time—twenty-eight years, to be exact. You naturally took an interest in the place. She watched her neighbours' mouths as they moved. More women on this seat, more babies; and a working man reading a crumpled newspaper!

The women were evidently saying exactly the things which Marcia said, and Cordelia, and one's stepmother. There were very few sentences in the world, and all jaws snapped at the same ones.

The Army went round the corner. She was thankful for that. Yet noise remained, and the brazen sun and the myriad, watching eyes. Every time you changed your seat, the eyes that followed you not only seemed to double, but to brighten.

Oh, this hard sunlit day that, by the river, was gossip and grubbiness, and oranges and eyes; that, in the Square, had been paint-pots and ladders and whistling—when would it end and let you be quite still!

It was early afternoon, not tea-time yet. Tea-time! How silly, how safe and snug—how of home it seemed.

The wind was cold, the sun was hot. You felt blistered and frost-bitten, in one discomfort. You felt curiously blank, and you looked with increasing distrust, with growing debate, at the river as it flowed. She sat near a bridge. That was a dreadful-looking suck and swirl of water round the green-stained piers!

Amaza, always interested in her own sensations (and why not?—they were nearest to you and the most real!), was ardently interested now. Her own emotions were the one thing left. Sun and wind, garrulous neighbours—on the seat and for ever passing at your feet—they had receded. They stiffened your body, knocked at your brain, but your spirit was clear of them, and for ever. Humphrey was no more to her now than that beggar in the frowsy brown rags. They were playful rags; they fluttered with each gust. The beggar's face was jovial. He was asleep, and he twitched now and then; he grinned and he grunted.

Somebody else on the other side of the seat was eating an orange and in the most unpleasant way. The People were very fond of oranges. You smelt them and listened to them; you saw the golden bits of peel in the dry gutter.

Amaza went picking away at her own soul. She was absorbed and vague. Soon, you would have no feelings in particular. Or would it be just another set of feelings? She sat thinking; in short sentences, simple thoughts on hidden things.

What lay beneath the river? This through the river, did it lead to Jim-John? Beneath the river, deep and deep, was there a crystal floor, was the air rosy with forbidden joys returned? Did the river lead to an even more than Jim-John? For even the delicious touch of her child had cheated her sometimes, and told her that this was only a passing token of the Highest, after all. There were clearer heights above, and, whether you liked it or not, you were forced to climb them.

Beneath the river! Did the Supreme Being dwell there; He who had planted the vague desires in your

heart? The answer and the perfect quieting, this lay in His Heart only.

Sitting on the seat, between the sleeping beggar and the dusty-looking mother who sucked oranges, she moved through her life again from the beginning: dwelling on the Conventicle and Dr. Strap; on the fervour of her father's untutored prayers and the rigours of his punishments to himself and to his only child. This phase came first and was most vivid. Then you went on to your stepmother and the puffy-faced, polite Langfields. You looked at Sebastien and listened to him. You saw, so to say, the fragments of slaughtered Vicaresses lying at his feet. Sebastien had been absurd. She laughed out loud. The woman stared, the beggar stirred. Then you went on to Sir Walter Wintle. You were living in those garish rooms, you cuddled the darling black cat, Beaumont. You sat drinking and flushed in the sawdust place; you were warm with Victory and Shame. Later on (you couldn't possibly evade it or hang back), you passed through the phase that came after Sir Walter; the mystery and horror, still veiled a little, thank God, that came between flying from him and finding Marcia. You found those people, and you dwelt in those plâces again.

After Marcia, things were less vivid; more of the real and less of the dream.

She got up again and walked restlessly about, watching the water beneath the bridge, jumping when the clock at Westminster struck the hour.

It was a long time to wait until dark. She stood still, her arms upon the parapet. Grey waters were pallid and sluggish; there was irony in the twinkle of that broad band where the sun fell. At night, with the magic of lamps and the softness of infrequent stars, one would find courage. Just a scramble up, a last look round, a big jump! Then Jim-John; yes, and a More than Jim-John. Wasn't that so? Yet you'd like to feel sure before you started. There was no coming back.

Had there been any one to ask! Had the fiddler come, or the friendly Chickweed and Groundsel person of long ago! She yearned for any one who would be

simple and true, who would feel sure, who would give sound advice based on personal experience.

When she walked on again (the whole afternoon, so far, was a dull sitting down and a dreary moving on), she looked hard into the faces of men, of women and of children. They were all blissfully assured. They asked no questions, yearned for no answers. Their souls were asleep. These were not men and women, not children. They were just complex and delicately adjusted pieces of machinery.

It was queer to be friendless and in a world that was chock-full of machines calling themselves people.

Perhaps in the country you might meet some one who knew and would advise upon this matter of the river. She thought of the country, as it would look on such a day as this. Roads would be hard, with a constant cloud of dust; with grey hedges and startled birds, as the holiday traffic tore by. Hard laughter would go flying through the trembling trees. Yet in woods and meadows and little green orchard places, the high grass, swept through and through by a roystering wind, would look deeply blue. Distance would be heavenly violet; wild parsley and the stitchwort as snow.

If one took train and went into the country! She had a little money, not much. But—if, and if! Why drift, when—staring at the river again—here was rest and, perhaps, solution?

There was some quick clamour in the road; no, not clamour, but a silence that arrested you. People, as they watched, forbore to suck oranges, just for once in a way.

The crowd became one sleek amused smirk; yet it was mirth touched to ghastly, and some mouths showed plainly anxious. There was a breeze of new feeling about, a sense of distress, and a rough attempt to throw it off. All this you could guess as you watched their eyes.

That Symbol out in the road redeemed the world from being just machinery, and this, at least, was consoling. It bade men and women look beyond their well-oiled parts; beyond their nuts and screws; beyond the cunning

construction which, after all, only meant their bodies, and not the whole of them.

You might hate the Symbol, or you might love it; as you chose. Amaza already loved it, and with a love surpassing; with a feeling that was not new, but new-found—and she never did things by halves!

There went the Cross along the broad road. You could not ignore it. Every emotion, baldly expressed, played on the people's faces. Women held up the children on the seats to look. The beggar was the only one who did the defined thing. He stirred, stared round, then spat. He was nearer his salvation than the rest. For he hated the Cross: you must hate or love it; there is spiritual death in indifference.

Amaza, thrilling, turned triumphantly from the river, stepped from the curb. She was uplifted and sure at last. She knew herself to be immortal. You wouldn't ask questions any more; questions upon questions all the time. You would not pelt God with them, and have them come hurtling back on your own heart. All her sure and lovely feelings returned; the queer fanciful raptures she had felt as a child and had lost ever since; the dreaming which was better than the real—because so much realer.

Mood and knowledge, they were swift; the sure things are. Doubt had no part in it, nor ever would have. She was granted Faith.

Out in the road there, in the middle of wind and dust, beat upon by the constant, unimaginative sun; beset by the good-tempered, yet craven jeers of holiday-makers; spat at from afar by the beggar, followed by the few, she saw the Cross. It was surrounded by a few devout men. Just the Cross and a scatter of mystics! Such a little—yet all the lot! There in the road moved the meaning and the fruition of the whole world. There went the joyful thing.

Never wavering, false to the river and for ever, Amaza went and walked behind. She made the last of the little crowd. Her blazing red head was held up (never had it burned more). Her eyes were steady. She was young and straight; very lovely. Her body breathed health.

Comeliness swayed to her slightest movement. It was no broken life she gave. Life should be long and very rich in service.

She said continually within herself, "God will be glad."

She walked virginal. No one but Jim-John had left any impress. Motherhood had dealt her some added holiness, and that was all.

She walked; not knowing what the next moment might bring or at what spot the journey should end. The Future was heavily shrouded; yet, through the heavy wrappings, you discerned the wonderful Form.

Everything was settled. There moved the Cross and you followed. What more was wanted then?

She said again and again, "God will be glad"—knowing that this was not braggart. He would be glad—as if she alone were His one created creature; and equally, surpassingly glad if the beggar on the seat would follow too.

The beggar! She turned to look. He was nodding again; beard on his breast, sharp sun, sharp wind filtering his rags.

This was a solemn, a most merry progress. She moved; buoyant, yet never bombastic; ardent, yet always humble. It was no revivalistic stride; no flash in the pan of hectic emotionalism, which would leave one worse than before. The knowledge of the Lord meant a long learning; it meant work and joy and much penance. This she already knew.

You had been looking about for a long time, for all your life; looking, in your utter ignorance, everywhere—never flinching.

The joyful thing had come at the last, of its own volition. You were enraptured and content to follow. That was all.

THE END

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